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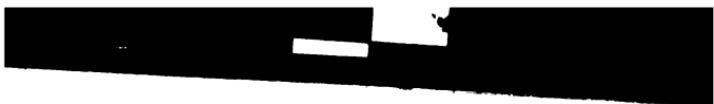








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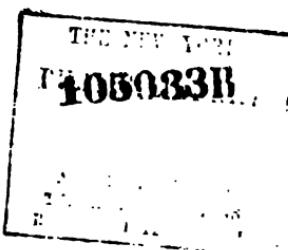
HERSCHEL S. HALL



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CHAPTER I

THE PLACE

STEELBURG is an ugly hole of a place. Steelburg is a hideous hole of a place—with its crooked, illy-paved, unswept streets, its festering alleys, its foul sidewalks unwashed and gummy; with its ramshackle, unpainted houses, its smoke-stained, window-cracked, spire-sick churches, its seedy disreputable business blocks; with its grassless parks, its treeless commons, its vegetationless front yards; with its hard-faced, tired-faced inhabitants, who wear old clothes seven days in the week, and go slouching in their walk, scowling continuously, smiling never.

A pillar of fire hovers over Steelburg at night, a cloud of smoke by day, for Steelburg is a place of mills and furnaces and foundries and factories and railroad shops—it is a great industrial center. Approaching Steelburg by night or by day, you mark its location when you are yet twenty miles distant, for a dozen flaming Bessemer converters keep the heavens aglow all through the night, and a hundred tall stacks pour out dense masses of black, sticky smoke that fogs the sun in murky mist all through the day.

The mighty blowing engines of a dozen blast furnaces whine and sob and shriek through the twenty-four hours of every day of every week of every month of the year, and the furnaces throw down upon the city a dry red rain of ore dust—fine, gritty, abrasive, ubiquitous stuff that

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sifts through the Steelburgers' clothing, smuts their faces, dirties their ears, clogs their nostrils, gets into their food and wears their teeth away. It explores every chink and cranny, however tiny, and works its way through closely shut house windows, and drives to despair the housewives who give a thought to cleanliness and neatness.

And with the red rain falls the black snow—the soot flakes from the hundred stacks of the mills and from the five hundred locomotives that puff and pant and labor day and night throughout the city—big flat flakes of soot, greasy and clingy and nasty; little stringy bits of soot that come wriggling down through the thick atmosphere as wiggle-tails wriggle through long-hoarded water in old rain-barrels; puffs and whirls of soot, dry and impalpable, blown about like blizzard dust. From the flaming converters drift down dense clouds of saffron-colored smoke, sulphurous and manganeseous, smoke that nauseates and gags; and from the tall chimneys of the Open Hearths—there are fifty of them in Steelburg—and from the white-lipped cupolas of the foundries float foul-smelling fumes, sickening and suffocating.

Steelburg stinks. Through the open doors and windows of the foundries come queer odors—rank unpleasant odors—of burnt sand and molasses, scorched flour and oil, hot earth mold, boiled junk of a thousand mixtures; and often, when a ladle of molten metal tips and a man is burned, the sickening smell of cooked human flesh. Every breeze that blows from the region of the wire mills comes reeking with the stench of the filthy liquors through which and in which the wire is drawn and pickled; and the wire workers leaving their work—their hands, their shoes, their clothing smeared with the slime of the vats—are an offense to all nostrils other than Steelburg nostrils. Noisome gases from the furnaces are wafted through the streets, and in the sickly



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atmosphere hang suspended in hazes of greenish blue or yellowish brown.

And because the city of a million people of which Steelburg is a corporate part has chosen Steelburg as its dumping ground for all that is evil and unpleasant and unwholesome and repelling, there are the stock-yards and the abattoirs, the tanneries and the breweries and the fertilizer plants and the oil refineries and the garbage-reduction works—to add their thousand disgusting smells to another thousand.

In Steelburg, too, because the huge city of which it is a corporate part regards it as nothing more than its back yard, are located the county jail and the city work-house, the insane asylum, the criminal reformatory, the pest house, the poor house and other institutions that are shunned by the fastidious. Aye, Steelburg is an ugly place, a hideous hole of a place! If you doubt, ask a half hundred of the several thousand workers who travel out of Steelburg every evening after their day's work is done, and another half hundred of the several thousand who quit Steelburg every morning after their night's work is over—ask them why they do not live in Steelburg.

Time was—but that was nearly a hundred years ago—when Steelburg was not ugly. It was not called Steelburg then, but bore the happier name of St. Clair. A place of importance it was, too, in those far-away pioneer years, more important, in fact, than the neighboring tiny village which later engulfed it, cursed it with industry, and renamed it.

Venerable Major Fronk, who was born in St. Clair, and who has lived in St. Clair and Steelburg every day of his long life; who spends his time at the Grand House, playing old tunes on his old violin or reading bound volumes of old magazines or breathing anathema against the swart-faced sons of Europe who have turned his beautiful St. Clair into ugly Steelburg, once un-

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burdened himself of a poem of eighteen stanzas. In anything but panegyrical language it celebrated Steelburg. Failing to persuade any local paper to publish his masterpiece, the major committed it to memory, and now on the least provocation he recites it to any one who will listen. He recited it to me. As an indicant of the general tenor of the dithyramb, let me set down its first stanza:

*O Steelburg! O Steelburg! What fame belongs to you!
You have the bug house in your midst, you have the
pest house too;
You have the hog hair drying yard, you have the garbage
plant;
And railroads twist about your streets and locomotives
pant;
Here, too, the steel mills boom and roar, their flames
light up the skies;
Here, too, are stockyards, slaughter pens and stinking
tanneries!*

The major was breathing hard when he had reached the last line of the poem:

In Steelburg I was born, by God! in Steelburg I will die!

That ringing last line left him in such a state of exhaustion that I took him into the Grand House bar and bought him a bracer.

"Yes, sir, I mean just that!" he declared with vehemence, after he had somewhat recovered from the debilitating effects of his declamatory efforts. "I was born here, I have lived here, I will die here! They can't run me out! Don't I know it is a rotten place? Don't I know a fouler hole does not exist this side the River Styx? Don't I know that all the decent people moved away from here years ago, and that decent people are found here only as necessity brings them here? You could comb this city from one end to the other and you wouldn't find another white man living here from choice.

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Yes, you would too—I forgot—there's Wally Gay. I forgot Wally Gay, darn his picture! Wally's all right, Wally is!"

"Wally Gay!" I exclaimed. "Why, I'm out here to get the story of Wally Gay. Perhaps you could——"

"No, I can't tell it to you," he broke in. "I can't talk long at a time—it tuckers me out, you know—and the story of Wally is rather a long one. I'm tired out now. I guess I'll play a little tune or two on my violin; that always rests me."

He left me abruptly, and in a few minutes I heard the strains of the old hymn, There is a Green Hill Far Away, played on a violin, floating from the gloomy parlor of the old hotel.

I went out into Steelburg to get the story of Wally Gay. Before I had gone a block from the Grand House I had passed a dozen saloons and seen a score of drunken men; on every side I heard coarse, profane, ribald talk; I saw crowds of filthy, half-naked children playing in the gutters; I heard loud-voiced, tousled-headed women screaming and cursing in rubbish-filled yards; half-starved dogs sneaked past me; two blear-eyed, bulbous-nosed fellows begged for a dime; a hollow-eyed youth asked me for my cigar butt. I smelled the Steelburg smells—sickening fumes from the furnaces, foul odors from the abattoirs and tanneries and refineries, disgusting stenches from the garbage-reduction plant. I shuddered; I was filled with loathing for the place.

A traveling salesman came hurrying out of a dirty little grocery store. He looked about for a clean spot on the sidewalk near the curb where he could set his grip, failed to find it, and threw down a newspaper, on which he placed the bag. He shot his cuffs and looked at them; he took a small, round mirror from his pocket and examined his collar. Both cuffs and collar were peppered with soot flecks. He stepped about gingerly on the sticky pavement and stooped down and turned up the bottoms of his trouser legs. As I approached him

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he turned toward me, caught my eye, read my thoughts, sensed my feelings and gave me a friendly grin.

"Hey! Can you beat it?" he called to me. "Ain't this one lovely hole? Isn't it, though? Let's go!"

He picked up his bag and hurried away toward a street car that was stopping at a near-by crossing, shouting back over his shoulder, "Come on! let's get out of this place!" and beckoning with his hand.

But I stayed in Steelburg—stayed until I had obtained the story of Wally Gay. My search led me into queer places, for I talked with many men. Then it was I discovered what an ugly place is Steelburg, what a hideous hole of a place it is.

CHAPTER II

THE CAR THAT WASN'T SEALED

OLD Joe Gay with his gang of fifteen men was unloading pig iron back of the Bessemer. He had made good progress that morning—he had thrown off twelve carloads of iron. Only two cars remained on the side track, and old Joe was glancing anxiously down the mill yard, watching for the coming of the yard engine with another drag.

"If McNutt doesn't hurry along with that there pig I'll be havin' fifteen fat bohunks loafin' on me hands mighty soon now," he muttered.

He turned and saw two of his men climbing into one of the remaining cars of iron.

He could wait no longer. He started across the yards toward a dingy little shanty, above the door of which was nailed a board carrying the crudely painted words "Yardmaster's Office." Reaching the little building, he opened the door and stepped inside.

"Say, Mac, when am I goin' to get that there pig?" he demanded of a stout man who sat in a large comfortable chair with his feet elevated on a flat-topped desk, smoking a pipe and staring at the toes of his shoes. "Whish, man, I've got fifteen bohunks lollin' round on the ground right this minute, talkin' agin the Government and plannin' a boom-throwin' contest, just because you let me run out of somethin' to do. Every man jack of 'em a anarch-ist, Mac. We oughtn't to allow them kind of laddy-bucks to get their heads together these days, Mac. Did you read last night's *Press*? I see them bloody anarch-ists in Europe has slewed another king. They'll be *doin'* that right over here among

us, Mac, if you don't keep that track down there filled with pig. What's the chance?"

"Duckbill's just left the transfer with a drag of twelve cars. He'll be here in about fifteen minutes," replied the stout man at the desk—Yardmaster McNutt.

"That's good. Box cars or gons, Mac?"

"All boxes, Joe. Gondolas are scarce as blue diamonds."

"Dern them box cars for haulin' pig in, I say! I could unload a hundred tons out of gons, usin' the new contraption they've give me, while I'm unloadin' ten tons out of boxes by hand. Well, punch 'em along, Mac, punch 'em along. As I told you before, me bo-hunks is sufferin' for pig. They're loafin'——"

"You're just starting in on your next-to-last car, Joe," said McNutt without looking up. "What are you trying to give me? You're good for a half hour yet."

The old labor foreman glared at the yardmaster for a moment, then started for the door. There he turned.

"Snooper!" he snorted, and slammed the door violently.

Duckbill, christened Clarence Chesterton, conductor with Engine 22, came with the twelve cars of iron just as the gang was finishing the last car of the former drag.

"Duckbill, if you don't quit fetchin' me pig in boxes I'll land on you, I will!" grumbled the old foreman.

Duckbill grinned. "Pig costs coin these days, Joe. I reckon that's why they're shippin' it in boxes—so they can lock it up. Every one of them cars there is sealed up, just as though they was loaded with plug hats or grapefruit that might get stole."

"There's one that ain't sealed," said old Joe. "That first one there—P. G. M. 67677. The seal's been broke; there it is hangin' on the latch. Duckbill, I'll bet you broke that seal and throwed out a ton or two of the metal down by the canal where you live. Didn't you, Duckbill?"

"Sure, Joe!" chuckled the conductor. "Pig's worth

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thirty-five a ton. Not a bad day's work, eh, Joe?" He jumped upon the running board of the engine, and signaled to the engineer to back away.

"Get into it, boys!" yelled the foreman. "Slide the door back, Tony—it's already unlocked. Slip in, boys, slip in—don't be all day climbin' in a box car!"

A half dozen dark-faced, dirty, perspiring workmen climbed into the car. Hardly had they stepped inside when they began to laugh and whoop and chatter volubly. The workman Tony appeared in the doorway, a broad grin illuminating his dark face.

"Hi, boss, you come-a!" he called. "You come-a queeck, boss!"

"What's the matter now?" growled old Joe. "Throw out that pig! Throw it out!"

"You come-a, boss!" repeated Tony, beckoning with his two hands, and the other men in the car joined him in calling, "Come-a queeck, boss!"

Grumbling loudly, old Joe had a man place a large piece of timber in front of the car door, upon which he stepped.

"Boost me up a bit, boys," he ordered, and two of his men assisted him to climb into the car.

"What's wrong in here?" he demanded.

"Bambino, boss!" chuckled Tony, pointing to a large wooden box standing on top of the iron in one corner of the car, and secured in place by a number of pigs that were piled about it.

"Bambino, boss!" chorused the other workmen.

The old foreman climbed upon the iron and made his way over it to the box. He stooped and looked into it, and what he saw there caused him to grunt with surprise. The box was packed almost full with an old quilt and an old blanket, and lying on these, wrapped in a sheet that was gray with dust and flecked with minute particles of graphite, lay a tiny babe. Its great brown eyes were open, and something like a smile broke its lips apart as old Joe bent over it.

"Why, you derned little rooster!" he cried, snapping his big fingers above the tiny face. "You bloomin' little crawdad! Look at it, Tony—it's grinnin' at me, as sure as Lord made little red apples! Fetch the box out, boys! Fetch the box out!"

The box was carried to the door and handed down. Old Joe climbed out with more alacrity than he had shown in climbing in.

"Look at it, Tony—he's a-smilin' at me agin! Wouldn't that jar your maw's raspberry jam, Tony? Cute little shrimp too, ain't he? Well, I'll be danged!" Hands on his knees the old man stooped low over the infant and stared at it. Suddenly he straightened up. "Listen here, Tony"—and he spoke decisively—"you skip over to Ackerman's office and tell him to send a boss up here to run this gang. You tell Ackerman I'm goin' home—tell him I've gone home! Skidoo, Tony, and don't you loaf none on the way. Mike, you bring that little long box to me—that one over there by the post. Whish, man, get a hump on you!"

The little long box was brought and set down by the side of the larger box, and the infant was transferred—old quilt, old blanket, gray sheet and all, at one operation. Then the old man put the little box under his arm and walked rapidly down through the mill yard, past the roaring Bessemer, past the rumbling rod mill, past the blazing blast furnaces, and out through the big south gate, where two aged watchmen attempted to stop him to find out what he was carrying out of the yard. He pushed them aside and strode on, not stopping until he had come to the poor little cottage in Vinegar Gully where he and his old wife lived, and had lived for thirty years, childless and lonely.

They named the child Wellington. With both the old people the name was a favorite—with Jane Gay because in her childhood she had had a much-beloved uncle named Wellington; with Joe Gay because Wellington *was the name* of a little dog he had owned for a few

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weeks when he was a boy. But old Joe's pronunciation of the name was more like Wallington than Wellington, and before the boy had quit dirty dresses for ragged knee pants both foster parents and all Vinegar Gully were calling him Wally.

When he first began carrying old Joe's dinner to the mill yard—that was when he was seven—some of the younger workmen in the mills proposed to nickname him Piggy. He had come to Steelburg in a car of pig, therefore Piggy was his logical name, they argued. Old Joe objected.

He came upon a crowd of ten or twelve of them one day as they sat in the change room, eating their lunch.

"I hear some of you young laddy-bucks is wantin' to call that boy of mine Piggy. The lad's name is Wallington, and you'll call him Wallington or you'll call him Wally. The first feller that calls him Piggy will have me to lick! And the second feller that calls him that will have me to lick! And the third feller will have me to lick! I'll take you on, one at a time, and we'll start right now if you feel that way!"

The young men were troubled. "Sure, Joe," mumbled one of them, "we'll call him Wally."

"You bet you will!" said old Joe.

"We won't never call him Piggy no more, Joe," another declared.

"You bet you won't!" And the old man left the room.

So Wally Gay grew up in Vinegar Gully, the ugliest spot, the dirtiest spot, the toughest spot in all ugly, dirty, tough Steelburg. A group of four great blast furnaces stood on top of the hill at one side of the gully and smothered it day and night in clouds of red ore dust, and, when slips occurred, bombarded it with missiles of limestone, ore rocks and chunks of glowing coke; long rows of steel mills and foundries occupied the brow of the hill on the other side, and poured down dense clouds of black coal smoke from the boiler stacks, and yellow fogs from the Bessemer and Open Hearths, to mingle and mix with

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the red clouds of ore dust ; and great pots of thick, viscid, sticky, foul-smelling stuff, white and yellow and greenish black, the refuse of the mills, were dumped out upon the hill slopes, and their contents slipped slowly down into the Gully, to smear the streets and sidewalks.

Policemen walked in pairs through Vinegar Gully—it was safer that way. It was a dull night that did not produce a dozen fights ; a knifing, a shooting, a slugging affair caused scarcely a flutter of excitement—it was routine stuff. The worst saloon in the Gully was known as The Bucket of Blood ; the next worst was The Morgue. Uplifters sometimes came to the Gully, and went away convinced that knocking down, not uplifting, was what was needed there. And many a heathen in Baluchistan missed his daily tract because some philanthropist in the big city had heard of Vinegar Gully.

"What ? Send my money to Baluchistan, with Vinegar Gully at my back door ? Not much !" Its evil fame was far flung.

Wally Gay, the child, liked every phase of its wickedness, its wretchedness, its squalor and dirt and hideousness, as did every other Vinegar Gully child. He flourished physically and rotted spiritually—if we may speak of the spiritual life of a child—and mopped up moral filth and bad habits as a mop mops up dirty water. Before he was out of kilts—or out of whatever article of clothing he wore that corresponded with kilts—he was a little howling hellion. At an astonishingly early age he was a linguistic prodigy in the use of obscene and profane language ; he had learned to chew tobacco, to smoke cigar and cigarette butts, to swipe fruit from hucksters' carts, to filch tidbits from grocery stands ; he had learned to love filthiness and indecency, he had learned to be not ashamed of his nakedness, he had learned to completion all the vile, evil things that all children come to learn, sooner or later, whether they live in Vinegar Gully or on Eglamour Heights.

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When he was seven and eight years old he was carrying old Joe's dinner to the mill gate, and slipping past the old watchman there, to hide in the noisy mills and watch with wondering eyes the writhing red bars of iron and steel curling and twisting about the standings and shooting through the spinning rolls.

At nine and ten he was selling the big city's yellowest newspaper on the streets of Steelburg, and absorbing there knowledge of a kind of wickedness more refined than the wickedness of Vinegar Gully.

At eleven and twelve he was a water boy in the steel-mills yards, countering the rough banter of the men he served with banter rougher than theirs.

At thirteen he was a test boy at the Bessemer; at fourteen a door boy in the Open Hearth; at fifteen a pit-cover puller at the slabbing mill; at sixteen a hooker in the rod mill.

Not all the time, however, through these years, was he at work, for there were periods—of a month, of two months, once of four months—when he was a pupil in Sycamore School, one of Steelburg's public schools, the terror and the despair of his teachers. They feared the young rascalion and they loved him; feared him because of the reckless abandon with which he plunged into rule-breaking escapades; loved him for something they saw in the deep depths of his great brown eyes, and for a strangely tender little smile that would sometimes play about his sensitive lips.

He learned little at school. There came no truant officer into Vinegar Gully, and he went to school when he wished and stayed away when he chose. Old Joe Gay and Jane Gay were powerless to control him, and anyway they loved the boy too much to oppose him in any of his wishes. His teachers quickly learned the utter futility of trying to force him to study when he did not choose to study.

He learned little, and yet in some respects he was the

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brightest pupil in Sycamore School. His teachers marveled at the ease with which he did his lessons in numbers and, later on, in arithmetic, and they found something almost uncanny in the speed with which he solved difficult problems and handled great columns of figures and memorized long series of numbers. At his clever and skillful use of the pen and pencil they wondered too, for the boy's writing was the admiration of all who saw it. They knew that his proficiency in the one subject and his cleverness in the other he had not acquired as a result of their teaching—it was knowledge that he had always possessed; it was intuitive.

When Wally was fourteen years of age old Joe Gay died, after a short illness, and a few days later Jane Gay was carried to her grave. Just before his death old Joe called him to him.

"I found you in a car of pig iron, Wally. I don't know who your folks are, and I reckon you'll never know. The car was P. G. M. 67677, Wally; a box car—I remember the number well. But I put it down in the Bible so it couldn't get lost, and so you'd always have it if you ever wanted it."

The boy had then looked in the Bible and there he read, in Joe's cramped handwriting—"Wellington Gay. P. G. M. 67677"; and the date of his coming to Steelburg, fourteen years before, on a day in June.

The loss of his foster parents left him inconsolable. Through the period of the illness of the old people, and then through the long lonely days that followed their death and burial he suffered an agony of grief. He locked himself in the little tumble-down shack in Vinegar Gully and refused to be comforted. Old men and young of the gully came to speak with him, to urge him to come out and join them, but he would not see them. Women of the neighborhood came bringing him cooked food and dainties, but he would not open the door to them. Workmen going home from the mills late at night would see him sitting at the window, ghostlike in the pale,

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sickly light of the Bessemer's glare, staring out into the wretched street.

After two weeks of this isolation he was back at his work in the mills, a little more attentive to his duties perhaps, a little quieter, but in a short while he was again the Wally Gay all Steelburg knew—laughing, high-spirited, loud and boisterous.

Old Joe Gay had legally adopted him, but except the poor little shack in Vinegar Gully he had left to the boy nothing but his name. Wally continued to live there alone, his own housekeeper, preparing his own meals, attending to all his wants himself. When residents of the gully remonstrated with him or proposed his coming to live with some of them he put them aside.

"Oh, I'm all right. Doin' fine," he would say, laughing the while.

At sixteen he was hooking in the rod mill, and he was a good hooker. Sligo, the boss roller, knew it; he liked the boy and he was keeping an eye on him. And but for a moment too much of playfulness Wally Gay might have become a rod roller.

With the two other hookers he stood one day on the long, low incline back of the roll train, holding a light iron hook in his hands, with which he was keeping the rolled rods in place as in long graceful loops they slithered down the iron incline. Out of the whirring rolls shot the glowing ends of the red rods, like heads of fiery serpents, to be seized by the tongs of the roll hands, tossed lightly about, brought down, and thrust into guides for the return pass, while the looped rods poured down the incline in quivering streams of red. Rod followed rod in monotonous regularity, and the floor was alive with the serpentlike folds of the sinuous steel.

At one side of Wally worked a boy known about the mill as the Jumper, the name having been given him because of his nervousness and irritability. Wally found good fun in reaching across with his long hook, when the Jumper wasn't looking, and poking him—he liked to

see him jump. Sligo had seen him doing this and had ordered him to stop it, but the temptation was there, and on this day he could not resist it.

He looked at his rods. They were in place, the loops slipping and sliding over each other in perfect order, with the freed ends flopping into the troughs with a snapping sound like the cracking of whips. The Jumper's back was toward him. The long hook went out and jabbed the unsuspecting boy. With a yell he jumped forward, and his own hook went flying from his hands. Wally began to laugh, but he checked his laughter when he saw one of the rods on the Jumper's incline working out of place.

He darted across to restore it to its place, tripped, stumbled forward and set his foot within a loop. A swish, a snap, and the red-hot rod was kinked about his ankle, and he was on the floor among the snarling wires, being drawn rapidly up the incline toward the rolls.

His clothing was set on fire, the hot steel burned his hands and scored his face as the irresistible pull of the mill dragged him on. He screamed with pain and terror.

A whistle shrilled the danger warning and the workers at the rolls jerked back the glowing ends of the bars which they were about to thrust into the guides and held them aloft with their black tongs. Closer and closer he came to the spinning rolls, and deeper and deeper into the flesh of his leg burned the kinked rod. Suddenly a workman darted out from behind a roll train, seized a heavy steel-cutting ax, and with a quick and powerful blow severed the strand. The whistle shrilled, "Go ahead!" and the workers lowered their tongs and thrust the candent ends of the bars into the guides.

The injured boy was carried to one side, and chisels and tongs cut away and pulled away the twisted rod from his lacerated ankle. Sligo, looking at the deep red furrows in the quivering flesh where the burning rope of

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steel had wound round and round, said gently, "You ought to have listened to me, Wally. I warned you—"

"Sure, Sligo!" broke in Wally, smiling the queer little smile that had made his teachers love him. "All my fault, Sligo—I'll never do it no more!" Then he fainted.

When Wally came out of the hospital Sligo refused to take him back. "Too much ginger; altogether too flip and frisky to work here," said the boss roller. "You've got to be careful when you're working in a rod mill."

Wally was not sorry—he was afraid of the rod mill now. Sometimes he would look at the ugly scars on his leg. "S'pose it had got round my neck!" he would mutter. "I'm through with that rod-mill stuff for good!"

CHAPTER III

EVERYBODY'S GOAT

WALLY went to Ackerman, the yard superintendent, asked for a job and was made a roustabout. He liked the work better than any he had yet had, for it gave him opportunity to build up a wider acquaintance among the men of the mills; it allowed him greater freedom of movement, and it made it possible for him to investigate every nook and hole in the great plant. He proved to be a good roustabout, so good, indeed, that before a year had passed he was being called on to do all the dirtiest and most disagreeable jobs about the mills.

Was there a flywheel pit of one of the great engines to be cleaned out, a pit filled with rancid oil and engine drippings and floor washings? Wally Gay was called. Down into the filthy hole he would drop, grinning, to stand waist deep in the foul mess and ladle it out, heeding not the slop-over from the buckets swung above his head, laughing with the gang when some one purposely sloshed him with a pailful.

Was there a cesspool in the yard that must be looked after? Send for Wally Gay. Down into its dirty depths he went without a murmur, to muck and sweat in its fetid atmosphere until the abominable task was done, and then to come up smiling and asking, "Where's the next one?"

Was there a clogged sewer, choked with all the off-scourings and sweepings and dreary débris of the mill yards? Wally Gay would open it up—he was clever at that kind of work.

Who tarred the smoking roofs of the mill buildings on

hot summer days? Wally Gay. Who swept out the soot-blocked gas flues, down underground in stifling heat and Stygian darkness? Wally Gay. Who dumped the reeking refuse pots from the mills, on the slopes above Vinegar Gully? Wally Gay of course.

"He's a mark, if ever there was a mark," chuckled Ackerman, "but I really believe he likes his job. Let him alone—I'd have trouble in finding a man that would do what he is doing for me."

There was a hooker at the rod mill who thought much of Wally. One day he came seeking him.

"Say, Wally, let's beat it out of this here burg," he said. "Let's get out and see somethin' of the world."

"Leave Steelburg?" asked Wally.

"Sure! Steelburg's rotten!"

"I think it's a swell place."

"Oh, you saphead! Why, Steelburg is the rottenest place in ten States! Anybody'll tell you that. It's punk! Say, didn't you know Steelburg stinks so bad that the buzzards are scared to fly over it, afraid the smells might knock them off their balance?"

"I've never smelled anything wrong about it."

"Get out! You say you didn't smell that garbage foundry last night, with the wind blowin' up from the south?"

"Nope."

"You didn't! Well, let's say it doesn't stink. Nothin' never happens here, does it? What is there goin' on in Steelburg but work? Work, work, work, night and day, day and night, that's all! Half of the burg in bed, the other half workin', all the time! Nothin' never happens but work!"

"You go down to Vinegar Gully and watch them dagos fightin' with them new coons from the South, that just blowed in, and you'll think somethin' happens besides work. And say, Ed, you come down to my shack to-night and I'll take you over to The Bucket of Blood. Bulger the Bat and Woppy Crabbe are goin' to have a go at it with bare fists."

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"That so? Guess I'll come down. But I'm goin' to quit Saturday and light out of this place—goin' West. Better go 'long, Wally."

"Nope; I like Steelburg."

"But you ain't doin' no good here—you ain't gettin' no place. Why, you're doin' work here they couldn't get a green hunky to do. I wouldn't do it—not much!"

"I like my job, Ed; I'm makin' good money; I'm havin' plenty of fun, and I think Steelburg's a swell place."

"Get out!" The hooker walked away in disgust.

Ed Hannis left Steelburg. In a few weeks he wrote to Wally, describing the wonderful new steel city in Indiana which he had discovered and where he had secured a position. He urged his Steelburg friend to hurry on and join him. Wally read the letter, threw it away, and forgot Ed Hannis.

One day the roustabout was sent to one of the track scales to bail out the scales pit, which had been flooded by an overflow from a storage reservoir. He found a locomotive shoving a cut of cars over the scales, and he stepped inside the weigher's shanty to wait until the cars had been weighed out. A billing clerk sat at a desk, poring over a sheet of paper that was black with long columns of figures. His hair was tousled, his face haggard, and the pencil he held between his fingers twitched nervously—signs of the strain under which he was laboring. Suddenly he threw down the pencil and struck the desk before him a blow with his fist.

"What d'ye know about that, Bill?" he cried, turning toward a young man who was busy at the scale beam. "I can't find it! I've footed this sheet a thousand times, and I've crossed-checked it a million times, and I can't find the bull! What d'ye know about that, Bill? Calla Lily has been yelping for this sheet all morning—wants it for the monthly statement! It's got to be in by eleven, that's a cinch! Here's where I get the run-run, I'll bet a nectarine!"

Wally had walked across the room and was standing

near the billing clerk's desk, looking down at the sheet of paper that carried the long columns of figures.

"Say, you ain't got that right," he said, pointing at the figure five in one of the footings. "That one down there ought to be a four, and up there where you've carried it over you've got a six and it ought to be a seven."

"Huh?" grunted the clerk. "Where'bouts?" He hurriedly changed some figures, refooted a column, and jumped up. "Say, Bill, I've got it!" he cried, dancing about the room. "Wow! Wow! What d'ye know about that, Bill? Say, kid, how did you happen to see that?"

"Oh, I just saw it," replied Wally.

"You didn't happen to foot that column while you were standing there, did you?"

"Sure—that's easy."

"Huh? You did, eh? What d'ye know about that, Bill? Here, you take this pencil and let me see you foot this other column, this long one, and we'll see what you get."

"I don't want the pencil. You keep it and I'll tell you what to put down."

For a minute or two Wally's eyes were fixed on the long column of figures, traveling up and down it. Then he called out, "Two hundred and eighty-nine thousand, one hundred and ten." The clerk removed the piece of paper which he had placed over his total for the column. The numbers he had set down at Wally's bidding were the same as those he had concealed.

"What d'ye know about that, Bill? We've got a new adding machine here. Say, can you write a pretty fair hand?"

"Sure, I went to school."

"So did Bill; and Bill writes like a hen with muddy feet. Here, write something on this," and he pushed out a scratch pad. "Write this: Steelburg Steel Mills, Shipping Department."

Wally wrote as directed. The clerk picked up the pad and looked at it. He whistled in astonishment.

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"Look here, Bill—copper plate, by George!" he called. "Say, kiddo, how would you like to have a job in here, pushing a pencil and rustling the manila paper?"

Wally laughed. "Get out! Don't you go tryin' to josh me!" he said. "That engine's gone, hasn't it? I've got to bail that pit out."

"By the jukes, Bill, what d'ye know about that?" demanded the billing clerk after Wally had left the room. "That gink's a regular old adding machine. And write—say, Bill, look at that! He's got me skinned forty miles, and you a thousand! I'm going to tell old Calla Lily about him and try to get him to put that guy in here. He'd be useful. He'd make good here, don't you think, Bill?"

"Sure thing, Bobbie," replied Bill, "but if he comes in here to work I go out—unless he takes three or four baths first."

"What d'ye know about that, Bill? He is a little strong, isn't he? Well, I'll trot this sheet over to Calla Lily's office, and I'm going to speak about this lad—what's his name—Wally Gay?"

But Mr. Cecil Calla, chief clerk, who was refined, delicate and supernice; who, in spite of his six feet three inches of stature and his two hundred and four pounds of weight, sang tenor in the choir of one of the biggest churches in the big city; who minced in his walk and swaggered in his talk; who played the mandolin, and owned a complete set of Balzac in twenty-four morocco-bound volumes, and who possessed other evidences of culture—Mr. Cecil Calla turned a harsh ear to the billing clerk's recommendation of Wally Gay.

"No, Robert, no—it's not to be considered. The young man is impossible. He's very crude, Robert, very low. I've heard Mr. Ackerman talking about him at the superintendents' meetings."

"But he's there with bells when it comes to figures; and write—say, boys!"

"No, Robert; I want the men on my force to possess

qualities of refinement and genteelness. I want them to be of a class different from that class to which the mill workers belong—more cultured, not so rough."

The billing clerk went back to the weigher's shanty. "What d'ye know about that, Bill? Calla Lily says you and me are more refined, more cultured, more genteel than the guys that work in the mills. Give me a chew of your spit-quick tobacco, Bill, and we'll argue the question. He won't have anything to do with that human adding machine that was in here—says he's too crude. What d'ye know about it, Bill?"

Bill passed over his package of scrap and grunted.

Meanwhile Wally was finishing his task, bailing out the flooded pit—a nasty, disagreeable job for any man but Wally Gay. When the last bit of muck and slime had been scooped up and thrown out he climbed to the top, replaced the cover on the manhole, and picking up his bailing bucket set off down the yard, whistling gayly some tune he had never heard before, improvising as he went. He had quite forgotten his little talk with the billing clerk in the weigher's shanty; he was thinking of his next job—he was to paint a tall rusty smokestack.

Past the ore docks and the pig-iron stockyards he trudged, and in between two long lines of freight cars. Suddenly his whistling stopped, the iron bucket fell from his hand and rolled bouncing away over the slaggy ground. He stood before a worn and dilapidated old box car, staring up at the car's initials and number; and that number and those initials were P. G. M. 67677! He walked to the side of the car and read them there again: P. G. M. 67677.

He stepped to the door of the car, which was standing open, rested his elbows on the rough flooring and looked in. The car was empty. He saw grains of wheat and oats and corn scattered about, and there were pebbles of coke and little piles of broken straw and pieces of limestone and crushed rock.

He remembered what old Joe had told him of his com-

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ing to Steelburg in a box car loaded with pig iron. He remembered the car's number and initials that the old man had given to him, and he remembered too that entry in his foster parents' Bible—P. G. M. 67677. Here was the car!

"That's a funny thing!" he muttered. "I wonder if this car's ever been in here before, since that time. I'm eighteen years old. I didn't think cars lasted that long. I'll ask McNutt. Wonder which end of the car I was in. Might have been that end; might have been that end." He picked up a piece of rotten wood that lay on the floor before him and slowly crumbled it to dust. "Funny business!" he murmured.

He picked up his bucket and walked on down between the two lines of cars until he came to the open yard. There he turned toward the yardmaster's office.

McNutt was still yardmaster at Steelburg Mills, but McNutt was older, grayer, stouter now. He had a new office and he had a new chair and a new desk, but Wally Gay found him in the same old position he was occupying that day, eighteen years before, when Joe Gay came to ask him to hurry up with that drag of iron.

"Say, McNutt, how long's a box car good for?"

"Eh? What's that? Hello, Wally!" The yardmaster dropped his feet from the desk, sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What did you say, Wally?"

"How long is a box car good for?"

"Oh, ten or twelve years usually—it depends on the way they're handled. With good usage they ought to last twenty-five or thirty years, I suppose. Why?"

"I seen a car down in the yard that was in here eighteen years ago; and I got to wonderin'."

"How do you know that car was in here eighteen years ago?"

The question confused the roustabout, and his face flushed. He never talked to any one about his coming to Steelburg, and no one ever mentioned the subject to him—but once. Tom Lakkkin, a steel worker, had

tumted him about his birth, and the boy in a rage that was almost maniacal had nearly killed the man with a shovel. He did not care now to answer McNutt's question, so he lied without hesitation:

"Denny Danks told me he remembers havin' that car off the tracks in C Yard, eighteen years ago, and workin' half a night to get it back on."

"What's the number?"

"P. G. M. 67677."

"How is it you happen to remember it, Wally?"

"Oh, I remember numbers, all right. Say Mac, what road is that P. G. M.?"

"Western road—Dakota or Minnesota, I think."

"Think that car's been in here any since that time Denny Danks saw it?"

"Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't—can't tell. Probably not, though—it's a long way from home. That car's done most of its work west of the Mississippi."

"What'll you do with it?"

"Start it toward home—send it west. Not allowed to send it east."

"Well, so long, Mac. I've got to go—got a stack to paint."

McNutt rose and went to a window and watched Wally going down through the yard.

"By grab, I'll bet that's the car he came here in!" he muttered. "Old Joe must have told him. I'd just like to know, though, to be sure. By grab, I can find out! I remember putting a blue-pencil cross mark before that car's number in the yard clerk's book!"

"Hey, Flammy!" he called to a young man in an adjoining room. "Fetch that flash light and come up in the attic with me. I want to look up an old record!"

The two climbed up the stairs into a dirty unlighted lumber room. Against the walls great stacks of old car-record books were piled.

"It was in June, all right—I remember that," the yard-master said to himself, "and Wally is eighteen. If these

files haven't been disturbed I ought to find it. He Flammy, pull this one out."

He opened the book and laid it upon a box, and while his clerk held the torch he bent over its dusty pages and ran his finger up and down column after column of figures, turning page after page. Then his finger stopped before a heavy cross mark that had been made with a black pencil.

"Ah! P. G. M. 67677!"

The yardmaster read it as trainmen read car number "Sixty-seven, six, seven, seven."

"All right, Flammy; that's all."

They put the book back into its place and went down. The clerk returned to his work; McNutt sat down in his chair and lifted his feet to the top of his desk.

"I thought so," he murmured. "Queer about that boy getting back here and his running across it. That would make me, if I was in his place, feel funny. Guess I'll stroll down and have a look at it. Clever little chap Wally is. Good stuff in him. Tough, tough as a Tartar, but straight as a yardstick and steady as a stone hill. Some of these fat-salaried stiffnesses about this dump were so keen to grab all the good jobs here for their sons, nephews and second cousins, and for the young squirts that belong to their Sunday-school classes, and would give Wally Gay a half chance, he'd make some of them sit up and look dazed. By George, I'm going to speak to the Old Man himself about Wally!"

And McNutt did speak to the Old Man; but nothing came of it.

"Humph!" grunted the Old Man; and walked on.

And that day he made a place in the rail mill for the son of a former governor of the State, who wanted to learn the steel business. The young man came to work next morning in a monogrammed car, smoking a monogrammed cigarette, wearing a silk shirt, creased trousers, an Alpinish hat and spats. He lasted three weeks at four days.

Wally Gay continued to roustabout for Ackerman, still performing the hardest jobs, the dirtiest jobs, the jobs that other workmen refused to do. Then Ackerman, when his own work was well up, began loaning him to the heads of other departments when they were pinched—when there was a man missing, when there were no job hunters at the gates; and always the roustabout was given the worst end of the deal. He was sent down into the ash pits under the gas producers, into the tunnels beneath the soaking pits, into the roll scale holes, into the pits at the Open Hearths, to the cupolas to wheel pig iron, to the rod mill to pile hot coils of rods.

He always worked long hours, for he was a twelve-hour man, but not infrequently after he had done a stint of twelve hours he would be ordered to report for duty for the next turn, in some other department. Often he did a thirty-six-hour stretch, and more than once was he on duty for forty-eight hours.

"Everybody's goat and nobody's pet!" laughed Ackerman as he watched him. "If his brains matched his muscles we'd hold him here about a minute!" Ackerman's motto as a yard superintendent was "Broad backs and no brains."

Life was a rich find for Wally Gay—he enjoyed it, every minute of it. He liked Steelburg and he stayed close to Steelburg. Rarely indeed did he go beyond its bounds, not even to the big city of a million inhabitants, of which Steelburg was a corporate part. Steelburg sufficed for him—it held all he desired.

He liked to visit The Morgue and The Bucket of Blood after his day's or night's work was done and drink an iron cocktail with some of the mill men. He liked to walk the crowded streets of Steelburg on Saturday evenings and listen to the talking and the wrangling and the cursing, and watch the fights and count the drunks and look in at the dance halls and play a game or two of pool at Stollwerk's parlors. He liked to sit alone at his home far into the night and gaze at the flickering flames

—red, yellow, yellowish green—shooting up from the Bessemer and the blast furnaces, and catch the ghostly patter of the spittings—tiny spheres of metallic slag—as they rained down on the tin roof of his shack. He liked to lie in his bed and listen to the coughing and the grunting of the mighty blowing engines at the furnaces, the rumbling of the electric cranes, the crash of the ten-ton drop ball breaking up skulls and salamanders, the mutter and murmur of the rod mills, the snorting and panting of the locomotives hauling ore and coke and coal and limestone into the yards, hauling billets and rails and bars and rods and wire out of the yards.

Men came and went at Steelburg Mills, but Wally Gay stayed on. Young men with whom he had played, a boy, went away, came back, told wonderful tales of other mills, and went away again. Their stories did not interest him. Newcomers, strangers to him, secured jobs in the mills, worked a few days and left, declaring Steelburg too rotten a hole for them. He could not understand them.

Ed Hannis came back, wearing flashy clothes and sporting a diamond ring and a diamond stick-pin. He hunted up Wally, found him knee-deep in muck in a cess-pool, and kindly cursed him for a fool. Ed was now a heater in the big steel city in Indiana, making big money.

"It's a snap, Wally," he said. "Nothin' to this gettin' on in the world if you go after somethin' with both feet. Better come and go back with me—I'll get you on."

"Nope; Steelburg suits me."

"Say, you mutt, if you'd only go out there with me and look at that place for just about two minutes you'd take a tumble. Listen, Wally. I've got a private bathroom at the hotel where I stay that's better than the finest in this here bum burg. We're decent out there, we are. This hole-wow! I couldn't stand it no more now. I'm goin' out to-night. Will you go 'long?"

"Nope."

Again Ed Hannis went and Wally stayed on—stayed

on, "everybody's goat," a fixture of Steelburg Mills, an indispensable fixture. And then suddenly, unexpectedly he got a change. For the better? Not a bit of it.

At the ingot mill there were two ancient laborers. The timekeeper carried them on his books as Nicholas Waldron and Richard Drake, but to the mills they were known only as Nicker and Dicker. For twenty years they had been wheeling hot roll scale from the pit beneath the big ingot rolls. Theirs was a twelve-hour turn, and they practically lived the twelve hours underground, coming up occasionally with a wheelbarrow load of scale, pushing it up the steep incline, to dump it into a waiting car standing outside the mill building. It was very hot, very moist, very sticky, and very smelly down there among the foundations of the roll housings. It was hard work they had to do, it was dirty work, disagreeable work, but they did it, and they asked for nothing better.

Nobody bothered his head about Nicker and Dicker, nobody worried about their end of the work—nobody had to. The mill knew that the roll scale would be taken care of—leave the old boys alone. The timekeeper peeped in at them once a day and gave each a mark in his book. The mill boss went down once a fortnight, turned round and walked out again. And Nicker and Dicker mucked and sweated in the black hole beneath the rumbling ingot rolls, and wheeled their heavy loads of scale up the steep incline, sat in their foul little dungeon and smoked their pipes, talked, argued, quarreled, called each other bad names, cursed one another and loved one another. And there was drinking there on the sly sometimes, too—by one of them.

But they were beginning to feel the clutching hand of the creeping years—age was wearing them down. And a change in the mill had resulted in an increased output of blooms and a corresponding increase in the amount of roll scale made. They wanted a helper, they needed a helper. They went to Jaster, the mill boss, and made their demands. He refused.

"What? Put an extra man on that job? No! Positively, no!"

They waited until they were again working on night turn, and then, one afternoon, dressed in their best suits, they called on the Old Man in his private office and laid their case before him.

"Twenty year on one job, Mr. Teller," said Nicker; "an' the days we've been off in that time you could count on the fingers of yer two hands."

"An' allays doin' our work right, Mr. Teller," broke in Dicker; "an' not only ours but them other loafers' work on the other turn, that never keep things cleaned up good, an' leave it for me an' Nicker to do."

"An' more work now nor ever, since they changed them rolls," declared Nicker.

"An' us not so peert as we was once, Mr. Teller," suggested Dicker.

The Old Man looked at the aged pair and smiled. "I'll give you boys a helper," he said.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Nicker, touching his forelock.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Dicker, touching the spot on his bald head whence his forelock had fled.

They shuffled out of the office.

The Old Man told Ackerman to send Wally Gay to help Nicker and Dicker.

Ackerman protested, he roared, he howled. He couldn't get along without Wally Gay! He couldn't let that man go—he wouldn't let him go!

"Send him down," repeated the Old Man. "Send him down there to stay. Those two ancients are nearly through—they're not going to last forever. Wally will fit in there exactly when they're done."

Wally went to the ingot mill.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, d'ye know who they're givin' us for a helper?" shouted Dicker as he came bringing the news to Nicker, bringing it as fast as his old legs could carry him. "It's Wally Gay, Nicker."

"Wally Gay? No! Well, it's a piece of bloody good luck for us, Dicker, if it's true. Wally's a dawndy, Wally is."

"You said it then, Nicker—he is! There ain't a finer laddy-buck in Steelburg than Wally is—steady, clean-cut, hard-workin' boy. Jogs-jolly, Nicker, I don't know when I've been so tickled."

"Me, too, Dicker."

Wally rejoiced in his new position, of course. The work was hard, but he had done harder; it was dirty work, but he had done dirtier. He had a change! In truth he had been growing tired of his roustabout job, though no thought of finding fault or complaining had ever entered his mind. Here was something new. The clangor and clatter of the mighty machinery of the ingot mill, the glorious racket, the splendid din of the place, the feeling that big work, men's work, was being done here, and that he was playing a part in it all—this pleased him mightily.

With his work caught up he would leave Nicker and Dicker in their foul cubby-hole, talking their endless talk, smoking their ever-burning pipes, and go above to sit in some sheltered spot and gaze at the huge white ingots of steel as they went smashing through the rolls. He liked to watch the shining arms of the powerful engines that drove the mill, striking out, striking out, striking out noiselessly and irresistibly. And the reaching up of the black hands of the manipulators from black depths beneath the rolls and tables, and their tossing the dripping ingots this way and that, as though they tossed squared logs of cork, fascinated him, held him spellbound.

"Aw, but it's great, it's great!" he would say to himself.

And when some mishap occurred—when a bloom lunging toward the rolls missed the pass, leaped up, struck the housings, poured over the top and piled up, a crumpled, twisted, messed-up mass of sizzling white-hot steel; and the electric cranes came thundering down the run-

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ways, hoist chains clashing, motors humming, to seize the cranked bar and pull it straight before it went cold; and a score of men came running, grabbing up bars and sledges and hooks as they came, and swarmed over the standings and tables, to haul and sledge and pry—with what zest would Wally leap from his corner and join the gang, to sweat and strain with them till the huge cobble was loosened, straightened out and dragged away. And none yelled louder, cursed louder, laughed louder than he.

Fun? Aw, it was great! And he would go below and tell Nicker and Dicker about it, and get a bawling out from the old men, and be called a bonehead, a dub, a squash, a jackass and other harsh names.

With the coming of Wally to assist them, and with the consequent easing up of their work, Nicker and Dicker, for some unaccountable reason, had increased their daily consumption of alcoholic drinks. Perhaps it was because they had more leisure now to enjoy the effects of the stuff. Nicker had always confined his drinking to three places—at his home and at The Morgue and at The Bucket of Blood. Dicker drank at home, at The Morgue, at The Bucket of Blood, and at the mill, too, for he never failed to bring with him to his work a bottle of whisky, not a large bottle but one of sufficient capacity to furnish him solace through the long twelve hours of the day, through the longer twelve hours of the night, when he was working night turn. Now his bottle was larger.

He nipped it on the sly, offering none to Nicker, for he knew that it was strictly against Nicker's principles to drink while on duty; concealing it from Wally, because, as he chucklingly told himself, "Age oughtn't to set no bad examples for youth." And too, he knew he would be fired if word came to the Old Man that he was carrying liquor into the plant—the Old Man was death on that rule. The fewer who knew of his culpability the safer he would be.

It was by the merest chance and not through any care-

lessness of Dicker's that Wally one night saw the old man tipping his bottle to his lips and dropping it back into the pocket of an old coat that hung in a corner of their underground den. A few moments later as Nicker and Dicker went trudging up the incline, pushing their wheelbarrow loads of scale, he was sampling the contents of Dicker's bottle.

"That's not Morgue booze," he declared, smacking his lips. "He got that at the Turk's, if I know anything. Wonder if he's switched. Pretty fair."

He sampled it again that night; and he tasted it more than once the next night, and the next night too. He developed such a liking for the Turk's brand of whisky that he conceived a plan whereby he could play a harmless joke on old Dicker, enjoy a little portion of the old man's liquor, and not be caught at the trick either.

He brought a bottle with him the following night, an empty bottle, into which he decanted a third of the contents of Dicker's flask. Then from the water pail he refilled the old man's bottle to stopper level, shook it up and returned it to its hiding place.

For several succeeding turns Dicker was disturbed, mystified, unhappy. Then he quit buying at the Turk's and bought at The Bucket of Blood. He soon quit buying at The Bucket of Blood and bought at The Morgue. And from there he quickly went to Sam's place. And still he remained mystified and unhappy.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, somethin's gone wrong with booze. There ain't no more kick in it no more. I've tried the Turk's, I've tried The Morgue's, I've tried it at The Bucket of Blood, an' I've been clean up to Sam's place; an' none of it's got no more wallop in it nor so much blue buttermilk, not so much! Jogs-jolly, Nicker, what's the matter? D'y'e s'pose my system's got to requirin' a stronger-proof article?"

"I got a pint at The Morgue yesterday, an' it had a kick in it like a giraffe's, an' they tell me a giraffe kicks harder nor anything else," Nicker returned.

"An' I got a quart at The Morgue yesterday an' it was tame as tea. What's wrong?"

Nicker glanced around, saw they were alone, put his hand to his mouth, and said in a stage whisper, "Watch Wally!"

Dicker watched.

"The young whelp!" he roared to Nicker. "The yellow scroot! Why, the bloody little boozer! Would you have thought it of him, Nicker? I wouldn't, blast me if I would! But I'll fix him! Jogs-jolly, say, boys, just watch me! I'll fix him!"

And the next day he visited a Steelburg druggist.

"Somethin' that'll just put the dog to sleep, you know, an' not kill the beast, so I'll get a chance to slip up an' sock my toe in his belly a few times before he wakes up. The animal's been bustin' in my wife's garbage can for a month, every night, every night. It's a dog of my neighbor's an' I don't care to kill it dead, you know."

"Here's the stuff you want," said the druggist, taking down a bottle of white powder.

"Would it kill a man?" queried Dicker.

"No, not unless you overdid it. A small dose would make him sick and put him to sleep, that's all."

"All right, wrap me up a half pound or so."

"You mean a tenth of an ounce; that'll fix your dog."

"All right, wrap it up."

Wally laughed as he tipped his bottle that night. Then he made a wry face.

"He's switched again," he muttered. "He must've got this at the Dutchman's—it tastes rotten enough. Bah! Tastes like it'd been kept in a gum boot!"

He wheeled out a few loads of scale, then went and sat down by the old men. Neither of them was smoking, neither was talking—they seemed to be unusually alert.

"Hot in here," said Wally, stirring uneasily.

"Hot? An' why shouldn't it be hot in here, with all that white steel floppin' about right over our heads?" demanded Dicker. "Of course it's hot. Look at that red-

hot scale siftin' down back yonder, like red snowflakes on a black night. Sure, it's hot!"

"Guess I'll go up and get a breath of fresh air," said Wally, rising and starting up the incline.

Dicker dug Nicker in the ribs with his elbow.

"Oomph! Arf!" he struggled.

Outside the mill building Wally looked about for a place where he could lie down. He wanted to stretch out—his head was spinning. Rain had been falling and there was no dry place where he might lie down. He caught sight of a box car with open door, standing on a side track several yards distant. He stumbled across to it, stepped up on a timber and climbed inside. The car was loaded with coils of heavy, coarse wire. He threw himself down upon the coils and immediately fell asleep.

Fifteen minutes later two men came down the side track toward the car. They carried lanterns.

"What d'ye know about that, Charley?" one of them demanded as they neared the car. "I'll bet that's the car, right there. What's the number?" He was holding his lantern up. "P. G. M. 67677? I thought so! What d'ye know about that, Charley? Here old Duckbill takes and shoves this car away back here, and I've hunted half the night for it—been clear down to Katy Furnace, looking for it! And both doors open, of course! Well, let's get them shut and the thing sealed and carded!"

They shut one of the doors, latched it, sealed it, and moved to the other side of the car.

"What d'ye know about this night work they're sticking off on me?" The first speaker was again talking. "I don't like it, not a little bit. I've been working for this company for years, and here I am, batting round these yards after midnight, carding out cars. What d'ye know about that, Charley? Can't you get it shut? Give it a belt with that bar there. Hit it, man, hit it! It's late, I know, but don't be afraid of waking somebody up. Hit it! That's the stuff!

"You never get any place with this company unless

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you're a relation of somebody with a haul or belong to old Calla Lily's Sunday-school class. When I got promoted to shipping clerk I thought I was going forward. I was—like a snail going home! Old Calla Lily and his ping-pong piffle about having nice young men on his force gives me a pain in the plug hat! What d'ye know about that, Charley? Got your spit-quick chewing with you? Let's have a little jawful.

"P. G. M. 67677—that's the car, all right. Where did you say it's going? Montana? What d'ye know about that, Charley? Some trip. This old boat'll fall to pieces before it gets to Montana, judging from the looks of it. Pretty old, eh? What d'ye know about it, Charley?"

"They say you can take up a hundred and sixty acres of good land in Montana, free. Wish I was going there. Hand me another tack. Biff! Well, let's go and find that other car. Damn that Duckbill! Don't you say so, Charley?"

Before daybreak a yard engine had shoved car P. G. M. 67677 out to a main-line track, and just as the sun was coming up and trying in vain to thrust its red rays through the black fog of smoke that enveloped Steelburg Mills; just as the gates of Steelburg Mills swung open and thousands of hollow-eyed, tired-faced, sweaty and grimy workmen poured through them; just as the whistles of Steelburg Mills began shrilling and screeching and bellowing for the day crews to get into the grind—Wally Gay left Steelburg.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAR THAT WAS SEALED

AT his first awakening Wally could not have told whether the hour was midday or midnight. Just a moment or two of bewildered semiconsciousness, the sensing of terrific pains in his head, the hazy perception of some unidentifiable movement that was jostling him about roughly, bruising his body, hurting him in every nerve—just a moment or two, and again he became as one dead.

And when at last he opened his eyes in full consciousness, possessed of all his faculties, only that his memory seemed to be at fault, and began groping about him in the darkness, groaning at every move he had to make, crying out sharply as some lurch of the car would rack his tortured body into new spasms of pain, it was long past the hour of the next night, when he was due to report for duty at the ingot mill. Nicker and Dicker were there, wondering about him, fretting and worrying about him not a little, talking in low tones about him, whispering sometimes.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, where d'ye s'pose he is? Where can he be?" demanded Dicker for the fiftieth time that evening. "I'm gettin' fair scared, Nicker."

"I must say I'm puzzled, Dicker," returned Nicker. "Nobody never heard of Wally stayin' away from his work before, an' his goin' away right in the middle of a turn—why, that ain't Wally's style. It puzzles me."

"I wisht I was no more nor puzzled. Jogs-jolly, say, boys, d'ye s'pose, now, that that there dope I slipped in

the booze had anything to do with it, Nicker?" whispered Dicker. "I'm afraid, Nicker, I'm afraid it did."

Nicker shook his head. "I wisht you hadn't done it, Dicker. I wisht I hadn't tol't you."

"Me too, you blabberin' ol' fool! What the Sam Hill did I care if the lad was takin' a snort out of my bottle now and then? What did I care? He was welcome to it. If it hadn't been for you an' your blabby gabber—"

"Sh-h! Choke your whistle, Dicker! Do you want all the world to know?"

"That's right too. Jogs-jolly, say, boys, you don't think now, Nicker, that the lad might have gone dopy with the stuff an' fell in a hole sommers—one of them ol' gas flues or maybe in a sewer where somebody'd left off a manhole cover? D'y'e think I ought to tell somebody what I done?"

"No, no, Dicker, we'll wait some. Wally'll turn up, don't you fear. No use gettin' people stirred up an' askin' questions. We won't say nothin' to nobody—just keep it 'tween you an' me. We'll wait."

It was a hard night for the two old men. Dawn saw them in a state of nervous exhaustion, and never before had their work been so slacked. And the next night, with no news of the missing youth, was still harder for them. The mill was beginning to talk now, asking what had become of Wally Gay. Some, a few, laughed and said he'd had enough of being made everybody's goat, and had taken French leave for fairer fields. But the great majority shook their heads and whispered: "Something bad has happened to him. Wally would never have left Steelburg in that underhand manner. Why, no, he never would have left Steelburg at all!"

A week, two weeks passed, with no signs of the missing man. Nicker and Dicker were staying at home, unable to continue at their work. A feeling of guilt possessed them and made them want to hide their faces from the world. Daily they met at The Morgue or at The Bucket of Blood, and daily they agreed that it wasn't necessary

for them to say anything about the sleeping-powder in the whisky. The boss of the ingot mill was furious, raging equally against Wally and Nicker and Dicker for putting him in such difficulty—the scale hole was not being properly taken care of. The Old Man was annoyed that his well-laid plans had gone astray. Ackerman, believing Wally had sickened of his job and had fled, was secretly pleased—if he couldn't have the jewel neither could any one else.

In Vinegar Gully kind friends of the missing youth went to his poor little shack, forced a door, entered, pawed over and examined his poor belongings, and stole a ham, a safety razor, a near-silver teapot that had been one of Jane Gay's wedding presents, and a Life of Jesse James, shaking their heads and saying it was too bad about Wally, such a good boy! Then they went home to fry the ham, to shave with his safety razor, to brew a cup of tea in Jane Gay's near-silver teapot and to read the Life of Jesse James.

"I know where I'm at, all right—I'm in a box car, locked up good and tight; but where in Sam Hill is the box car at? That's what I want to know next!" Wally was talking straight into the darkness, following his awakening, and after he had groped about in the blackness for several minutes. "I'm in a carload of coiled wire, but how did I get here?"

He sent his mind back to pick up the lost threads of—as he thought—the past few hours. There was his drinking from Dicker's bottle. There was his finding the atmosphere in the underground den insufferably hot and oppressive. There was his going above and into the open, seeking fresh air and a place where he could lie down. There was—ah, now he had it! He had climbed into the box car because it was dry in there, and had dropped down upon the coils of wire, with his head spinning.

That queer-tasting whisky! Where had Dicker got it?

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It was fierce stuff! He had heard men at The Morgue and at The Bucket of Blood talk about knockout drops but it did not occur to him that there might have been knockout drops in Dicker's bottle. It was a case of bad liquor, extremely bad liquor—that was all. The drink and the heat below had made him drowsy, and once in the car he had fallen asleep. Some joker of a trainman had seen him lying there, and had closed the doors and latched them, and now they were shunting him here and there about the yards, probably taking the car to the scales to be weighed. A good joke on himself, he thought, and he smiled over it.

Then the noise of the wheels on the rail joints caught his attention and held it. *Clickety-click! Clickety-click!* *Clickety-click! Clickety-clickety!* The car was traveling rapidly. There was no stretch of track in the mill yards over which it could travel at that speed, nor for so long a while. *Clickety-click! Clickety-click!* *Clickety-clickety-clickety!* Oh, now he had it! They were taking the car to the storage yards, down by the canal! It was two miles to those yards. His anger rose—this was past a joke. He would probably have to walk back to the mills; meanwhile his work in the scale hole would be neglected; the gate watchman would see him as he went into the yard, and cause him trouble—he would be reported for going out of the mills during working hours.

Clickety-click! Clickety-click! Clickety-clickety! He sat and waited for a slowing down of the car, listening to the wheels on the rail joints. Suddenly he leaped to his feet. "This car isn't goin' to the storage yards!" he cried. "It's already gone three times the distance there!"

He became panic-stricken. He ran to the doors, beat on them with his fists, kicked them, tried to push them open, pulled and tore at them, unable to realize his efforts were futile. He shouted, he screamed, he cursed, and when he had exhausted himself he dropped down on the coils of wire and covered his face with his hands.

Clickety-click! Clickety-click! Clickety-click! He was

feeling weak and faint, and there were sharp gnawing pains in his stomach. *Clickety-click! Clickety-clickety!* He began to shiver with cold, and then he realized he was consumed by a raging thirst. *Clickety-click! Clickety-click! Clickety-click!* For hours—so many hours he could never number them, it seemed to him—he sat and listened to that nerve-torturing, monotonous clicking of the wheels on the rail joints.

Frequently there would come a sudden jerking and shaking of the car as the air brakes gripped the wheel treads, racking anew his sore and aching body, shooting quivers of arrows of pain through his throbbing head. One of these sudden checkings of the speed of the car dislodged a great coil of wire from its pile, and it came rolling down to the open space in front of the doors, bruising one of his hands as it came.

He fell into fitful slumber, waking to groan out his agonies, to shake with cold, to lick his dry lips. Once he woke and found the car standing still. It was very quiet there. Then he heard some one whistling, whistling a song he knew—Sweet Marie. The sound of the whistling drew nearer and nearer. He heard footsteps approaching—now they were beneath the car door.

"Open the door! Open the door!" he shouted, beating it with his fists, kicking it with his feet. "Open the door!"

The whistling ceased. "Hey? What's that? Who is it?" called a voice.

"Let me out! I'm locked in! Let me out!"

A moment's silence, then a jeering laugh answered his appeal. "Oh, you're locked in there, are you?" said the voice. "Well, buddy, you can stay in there till you starve and rot before I'll let you out, you damned bum!"

"Let me out! Open the door!" screamed Wally in an insanity of fear.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" jeered the voice. Again there came the sound of footsteps—they were receding now—they died away. And the brakeman—for it was one of

the train's crew—as he went was running his hand over an ugly scar on his face, the mark of a fight he had had with hobos two years before, since which time he had waged bitter and relentless war against all knights of the road. The imprisoned man sank back on the coils of wire, trembling, sick with fear, and in a few minutes the car was again in motion.

Clickety-click! Clickety-click! Clickety-clickety-clickety! That sound would drive him insane, he felt. He tried to stopper his ears with the tips of his fingers, but he could not shut it out—*Clickety-click! Clickety-click!* *Clickety-clickety!*

Sometimes he dozed, jerking and twitching; sometimes he slept, groaning and talking in his slumber; sometimes he rose up, to beat and kick against the locked doors. And when the car was standing motionless, as several times happened, he shouted, he screamed, he cried himself hoarse, but no one came. Rays of light shooting through a hundred cracks in the sides of the old car told him another day had come. He wondered at the ravenous hunger that gnawed at his vitals. Why should he be so hungry, so faint and weak, when he had eaten less than twelve hours before, as he thought? Why should he be so tortured with thirst in so short a time?

More than once he heard men running over the top of the car, but none of them answered his cries. Once as the train stood on a switch awaiting the passing of another train he caught the sound of children's voices near the door. He called to them. Their prattle suddenly ceased, and he heard the beating of little feet on the cinders as the frightened youngsters scurried away.

Another night. It was in early May and not all of winter's chill had gone from earth. The nipping cold that came with darkness crept into his veins, penetrated to his bones and all through the night he shivered and shook, curled up on the hard uneven coils of wire, groaning and moaning in misery. The steely bundles had been working loose in the piles and rolling down into the open space

before the doors until it was almost filled—there was no room left where he could move freely about and exercise his stiffened limbs.

His strength was going; burning thirst was consuming him; now when he tried to shout his voice rose scarcely above a whisper. He ceased to notice things—the motion of the car, the sound of the wheels, the shuffle of feet on the roof, the passing of time.

It might have been day or night, it might have been two days or three days, a week since he had left Steelburg—he did not know or care—when there came to him the realization that death was not far off. At the same moment he perceived that the car was not moving. And then just outside the door, against which he had fallen and crumpled up, very close to him, he heard a man cough. Almost immediately there came to his ears the far-away sound of a locomotive's whistle—two long blasts. An instant later there was a rattling of the couplers and drawheads on the car as the engine caught up the slack of the train.

From between his parched and swollen lips leaped a last despairing cry—the cry the drowning man gives as he looks at the sky for the last time, the cry the victim of the law pours out on the scaffold, the cry the trapped hunter makes as the wolf pack closes in.

A man, the man who had coughed, stood on the cinder ballast by the track close to the door. He might have been fifty years of age; he was very plump and extremely red-faced; he looked through gold-rimmed glasses; and though he was wearing a cheap baggy suit of blue overalls, clothing of better quality showed beneath—a white shirt, collar and tie, a black vest, and the upper edge of gray trousers. At the sound of the cry behind the car door he started.

"What's wrong in there?" he called. He waited no more than a second or two for an answer. "Heard that kind of a cry once before in my life!" he muttered.

He rushed to a box of track tools that stood near by

and picked out an iron bar. The train was moving off. He ran to the car, thrust the end of the bar through the loop of wire that carried the seal, snapped it, knocked up the latch pin, threw the hasp off the staple, dropped the bar and seized the iron handle on the door.

The car was getting under way rapidly. The door stuck fast. He jerked and pulled at it, getting redder and redder in the face as he worked. He was running now to keep up with the car. Once he stumbled and nearly went down. He caught himself, straightened up, and exercising every ounce of his strength gave one last powerful jerk. The door slid back a little way on its hangers.

He saw the body of a man come slipping out through the doorway, head first. He snatched at it, seized the clothing, checked his running quickly, and pulled. The body tumbled down, struck the ground and rolled over, splashing into a shallow ditch at the roadside half filled with water. The face, dirty white and haggard, was up, and as the water went over it the eyes opened. They fell upon the car that was slipping rapidly out of their line of vision.

"P. G. M. sixty-seven—" came from the black and swollen lips. Then the eyes closed.

The red-faced man dragged the inert body out of the ditch, looked at the swollen lips, and stooped and scooped up a handful of water, which he let trickle over them. The eyes did not open but the lips and the tongue began to move as the water continued to fall upon them.

"Here's a case, now! Sick man on my hands—Doc Holmes gone!" muttered the man, as he watched the effect of the trickling water. "No burn—plain enough. Shop worker—tell it by his greasy clothes. Young—very young. Get him out of here—take him up to the house."

A little distance down the track stood a small grain elevator. Up in the gable end of the tall building were the painted words and figures, "John Peterson—Capacity

50,000 Bushels." Evidently it was a very old elevator—the roof sagged badly, the corrugated-iron sheeting was falling from the sides, the whole construction appeared to be out of plumb. The man hurried to this building, entered a door at one end and quickly reappeared pushing a wheelbarrow before him. He trundled the barrow to the side of the unconscious form by the ditch, picked it up and placed it on the barrow. He spat on his hands, grasped the two handles and started away with his load.

Back to the elevator he went, passed it, and turned toward a square unpainted frame house standing several yards distant. He was breathing heavily and perspiring profusely when he came to the house, and his face was the hue of boiled beets.

A tall, thin, grim-visaged woman had come to the door of the house, and stood there watching his approach. He set down his load and rested, leaning over it, with his hands still grasping the handles of the wheelbarrow, for several minutes. Then he looked up. The woman had not moved, she had asked no question, her face showed no hint that she was in the least interested in what was taking place before her.

"The back bedroom, Katy. Make it ready at once!" he said. "Then a pitcher of fresh water; tub of hot water too! And a bowl of beef extract, Katy! Hurry!"

She turned and disappeared. He gathered up the still form from the wheelbarrow and carried it into the house, walking with difficulty, staggering a little. There was no one near to assist him. A half mile away could be seen a collection of houses, but there was none close at hand, and the road was deserted.

When Wally opened his eyes he found himself in a very plainly furnished room, lying in a very clean bed, the cleanest bed he had ever lain in. He saw a plump red-faced man standing at the foot of the bed looking at him.

"Well, how are you?" asked the red-faced man.

"Pretty well. How are you?" Wally always strove to be polite to strangers.

"How do you feel?"

"Rotten. Say, mister, what was the number of that car I was in?"

"Didn't notice. Why?"

"Why, I got it in my head that it was——oh, nothin'."

"When did you eat last?"

"About a month ago."

"Thought so. Better start to catch up. Katy!"

The woman came into the room, carrying a steaming bowl.

"Gimme some of that!" shouted Wally, struggling to sit up.

It was the third day after his finding himself in the clean bed before he left it to sit with the red-faced man on a little veranda at one side of the house. It was the fourth day before he told his story. No detail of it was omitted, not even the part of it that had to do with the purloining of old Dicker's liquor. His auditor gave him close attention, interrupting with no question or comment, gazing steadily all the while out across the great expanse of green prairie that lay before them.

"Quite a story," he said when Wally had finished. "Close call for you—door stuck—I stumbled. If I hadn't caught myself—" He waved his hand. "Tell you something about myself. Name's Peterson—John Peterson, Junior. Never mind the Junior—old gentleman dead. Bachelor—live here alone—have a housekeeper—old Katy Podkins. Stay here eight months, California four months. Buy and ship wheat. That's my elevator—father built it—going to pieces—pretty ancient. Great wheat country here—nothing grown but wheat. See that green stuff over there? Wheat. See that green prairie over yonder? Wheat. Wheat everywhere. Some hay—not much."

"What is hay?" Wally interrupted.

"Eh? What's that? Oh, yes, I see—city bred. Dried grass for stock—used to distend the stomach. Lots of wheat grown hereabouts—I buy most of it—ship it to

Buffalo—deal with Spencer & Banks. Fine people—rich firm—handle me well. Lots of work ahead now—man short—hard to get help—here's the case.

"Got a nephew—no good—sportish—spender—older than you—ten years, maybe. Worked for me two seasons—not much help though. Promised to help me this season—gone to Fargo—show business. Expects to get my pile—wants some of it now—don't like him—wouldn't trust him—couldn't. Got to have a man to help out—to run up and down stairs at the elevator—look after machinery—load out cars—so forth. I can't do it—too much blood—threatened with apoplexy. Got two old codgers—stand-bys—Ike Dooler and Pete Pddy. Ike runs the engine—Pete tests, weighs, receives the wheat. Good men, but old. Help scarce."

"So. Want to stay? I'll hire you. Two-fifty a day and board—live here with me. Treat you right—old Katy's a good cook—I like to eat. Well?"

"You want me to work here in your elevator?" asked Wally, not sure that he had kept up with Peterson in his rapid-fire talk.

"That's it. Will you?"

"Sure," replied Wally.

If Peterson had ordered him to stay and work for him instead of merely asking him, Wally would have made no demur—the man had saved his life; wasn't he under unlimited obligations to him?

"All right—start fixing things up—getting ready—soon as you're strong again. Go to Wheaton to-morrow—you and I—get you some clothes and things—my clothes don't fit you, eh?" Wally was lost in the suit of clothes Peterson had loaned him, and Peterson laughed as he looked at him.

"Want to show you the way to Wheaton, too—may have to send you alone sometime," Peterson went on. "Not much excitement here. Want to go to Wheaton Saturday nights, all right—let you have a rig."

On the following day they drove to Wheaton, the

county seat, fifteen miles distant from the siding where the elevator stood. Their road led across the level unbroken prairie, through vast stretches of land sown to wheat. Green as emerald, it met their eyes in whatever direction they looked.

"Wheat! Wheat!" gloated Peterson, waving his buggy whip about his head, bringing it to bear on every point of the compass. "Wheat everywhere! Our work—taking care of it—after it's harvested, threshed—getting it to a hungry world, eh? Lots of work ahead—plenty to do—big crop this year—make some money."

Wally let his eyes roam over the broad expanse of green, and felt a pang of home-sickness. "Kind of lonesomelike out here, ain't it?" he suggested.

"Lonesome? Not a bit of it!"

"Kind of quietlike too."

"Quiet? No. Frogs, birds, bees, crickets—in the summer, grasshoppers—katydids in the fall. Too much noise sometimes."

They rode on into Wheaton without much further conversation. At the town Peterson took Wally to the bank, where he introduced him to the cashier as his new man. He drew some money and handed Wally twenty-five dollars.

"Advance—buy some clothes—anything else you need," he said. "Meet me here at two—start back."

Wheaton was a solid little country town of three or four thousand inhabitants. Its people always spoke of it as a bustling place. Wally found it unbearably dull. He wandered about dull streets, had a drink in a dull saloon, played a dull game of pool with a dull young farmer, and by midday was consumed with ennui. Then he came upon a flour mill, and his eyes brightened as he heard the sound of working machinery—it was music to his ears. He quickly found his way into a remarkably dirty engine room, where he spent a delightful hour with a remarkably profane engineer whose fury against his employers knew

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no bounds because they made him burn a cheap inferior coal beneath his boilers. He charmed his visitor.

"Snappy little place," said Peterson as they started back.

"Not bad," agreed Wally. He was still warmed from his visit with the engineer.

In a few days the repair work at the elevator was taken up. Peterson, Ike Dooler, Pete Peddy, Wally and a carpenter whom Peterson had hired at Wheaton constituted the working gang. They unloaded a car load of lumber; and several shipments of machinery, iron sheeting and hardware of various sorts were received. Wally's spirits, which had been sadly drooping, began to revive—he worked with enthusiasm.

"Go a little slow," cautioned Peterson. "Don't try to do it all—take it easy—you got quite a wallop."

The carpentry work came first, after the materials were unloaded and stored. Wally did not like it. He could not saw straight, he hammered his fingers, trying to drive nails. Then he heard Peterson talking about the horrible mess in the basement that was awaiting them. He asked him about it.

"Worst job we've got—dread it down there—awful! Flood last fall—water got in—bin of wheat leaked—mud, muck, must, sprouted wheat—bah!"

Wally went down into the basement beneath the big bins and looked about. It was, as Peterson had said, a horrible mess. There were two or three wagonloads of mud and muck, and a great pile of rotted and sprouting wheat that would have to be picked up and carried up the stairs in baskets and wheeled away in wheelbarrows. He proposed to Peterson that he go to work on this job.

"I don't like to work with tools," he said. "I don't make much of a carpenter. You and Ike Dooler and Pete Peddy and that other fellow take care of the other work, an' I'll handle this."

Peterson looked at him in surprise. "Wouldn't ask

you to—too much—we'll help later—all together—but if you want to—go ahead."

He went below into the musty, foul-smelling basement and there shoveled and scraped and carried, while the others sawed and hammered and nailed and bolted in the building above.

"Drawn a prize!" chuckled Peterson as he watched his new man. "One fault—too willing—makes me feel cheap. Hope Edwin stays in Fargo till his whiskers are gray—don't need him here."

One day as Wally came up from the basement carrying a heavy basket of rotted wheat and mud he almost ran against a young girl who was just entering the door of the elevator. He stepped quickly to one side and set down his basket.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Nearly bumped into you, didn't I?" he laughed.

"It was my fault—I should have looked. Are you Mr. Gay?"

"Just Wally Gay, ma'am."

"Mr. Peterson has told me about you. I am Miss Creeth—Amy Creeth. I'm the schoolmarm, as they call me here. I'm also the superintendent of the Sunday school at the Dodder Creek Church. That's five miles north of here, you know. I came to invite you to our Sunday school. Mr. Dodge, Mr. Hiram Dodge, the cattle man, has quite a large class of young men. He'd be glad to have you join it."

Wally looked down at his basket of refuse, then he looked up at Miss Creeth and smiled, and Miss Creeth blushed and looked quickly away. She had glimpsed that queer little smile; she had seen that same something in those brown eyes that had made his teachers love Wally Gay, their most troublesome, most refractory pupil.

"Thank you, ma'am; I'll think it over."

"Please do, Mr.—Mr. Gay," she fluttered. "We'll expect to see you soon. Good-by."

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She hurried off to her buggy, which she had left near the elevator, untied her horse and drove away. Wally stood watching her until she had passed from sight.

"Nice girl!" he declared with emphasis; and he picked up his basket and resumed his work.

Thinking over, whether he should go to the Sunday school at Dodder Creek Church, he asked himself, "Now, what would Bulger the Bat at The Morgue say if he knew I'd been asked to go to Sunday school by a real fine girl?" And he laughed.

He did not see Miss Creeth again for three weeks. Then as he was driving across the prairie toward Wheaton—Peterson had sent him to bring out a piece of machinery—he met her in her buggy.

"Good morning, Mr. Gay," she greeted him. "We haven't seen you at our Sunday school. Haven't you thought it over yet?"

"Not quite, ma'am—been too busy. I'll think it over some more."

And again he smiled at her, and again she blushed and lost her reserve.

"Please come—I'm sure you'll enjoy it. You'll like Mr. Dodge. He knows about you and he wants you in his class. Good-by."

And she drove away. Over his shoulder he watched her.

"A darned nice girl!" he said aloud.

The basement was cleaned out thoroughly; the carpentry work was finished; the new machinery was in place; Ike Dooler had fired up his rusty boiler, over-hauled and oiled his ancient engine and made a trial run—the elevator was ready to receive wheat.

And none too soon. The silky swish of the waves of green that had been rolling over the ocean of wheat had given way to a sandpapery rustle; the green grain had gone yellow, gone golden yellow, gone brown, and the binders had come and reaped it and bound it in bundles;

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the shockers had come and shocked it, and now in a dozen spots the horizon was smudged with the smoke of engines drawing threshers to the fields.

"Wheat in a day or two," said Peterson. "We're ready for it. Real work starts then—hard work. You're going to stick—stay till I'm through?"

"Oh, sure," replied Wally.

"Want you to—like your work—you too. Let's go up to the top now—show you how to run things up there. Your job—can't climb—tough trip up—dangerous."

They toiled up the steep stairs to the top of the elevator. Peterson sank down on the floor. "Shouldn't do this," he gasped. "Too much blood—apoplexy—Doc Holmes warned me. Get me some day—find me stretched out, maybe—don't be surprised. Expecting it—going to sell out and quit this fall."

When he had recovered from his exertion he showed Wally the working of the machinery—how it should be oiled, how the spouts leading to the different bins should be handled, how the steel worm in the conveyor box could be uncoupled and removed in case of a break or choke-up, how belts were shifted and tightened, and how a lacing was made.

"Leave it to you, Wally—got confidence in you—keep your eyes open—always on the job," he rattled as they started downstairs.

Wagons loaded with wheat began to draw up and stand before the elevator, each waiting its turn to drive on the scales and discharge its load of grain. Pete Peddy was busy now, testing, weighing, poring over figures, adding and subtracting, making entries in his books, sharpening his lead pencil. Peterson was writing checks, visiting with the farmers gathered about the wagons, keeping a watchful eye on things in general. Old Ike Dooler was fussing and worrying over his antiquated engine, driving it to its little limit, and Wally was running upstairs and downstairs, looking after and adjusting pulleys and belting and shafting, shifting spouts, watching the solid

streams of wheat pouring into the blackness of the bins, listening to the rattle of the tiny grains on the floors and thinking how much the sound they made was like the rattle of the spittings on the tin roof of his shack in Vinegar Gully. The big work was under way.

"Say, what are you goin' to do when all these here bins get full?" he asked Peterson.

"Won't get full—empties coming in to-morrow—load them—begin shipping to Buffalo. More work, Wally—night work now—don't like it—has to be done."

The empty cars were shoved in, and it fell to Wally's lot to take charge of them—to patch holes in their floors, if there were holes that needed patching, to pinch them down the rusty siding, one at a time, to the loading spout, to board up the door openings, to load them, to close and latch the doors, and to report them ready to the station agent.

Work? He had never worked harder at the Steelburg mills than he was working now. Down in the musty, mildewy basement beneath the bins, poking at a plugged spout or unchoking a clogged conveyor; climbing the long steep stairs to the top of the tall building to tighten a pulley there, lace a belt or shift a spout or paddle; out on the tracks at midnight, sweating a "sticker" down the rusty rails of the siding to the loading chute; running errands for Peterson; spelling Ike Dooler while the old man was away for his meals; sweeping, shoveling, carrying—he worked, he worked long hours and hard hours.

"Makes things go," laughed Peterson. "Good man—best I ever had."

One morning Peterson did not come to the breakfast table.

"He's sick," said old Katy as she placed a tray of food on the table. "He wants to see you."

Peterson was lying on his bed, dressed, when Wally went to his room. "Knocked out," he said, smiling. "Done up for a day or two. Overworked yesterday—

that spill we had—ought to have been more careful. Means more work for you—have to bring Pete's papers and books here—make out checks—you give them to the sellers. Want you to talk to the farmers—jolly them—good fellow—if they ask tell them I'm off my feed—that's all. Be all right soon."

In addition to his work in and about the elevator, which could not be neglected, Wally had to make frequent trips to Peterson's room that day, carrying Pete's weights and tests, and his books that contained his calculations and the sellers' names. Peterson would verify the old man's figures and write checks for the wheat purchased, which he would give to Wally to carry back.

The next day it was the same, and the next, and all through the week—Peterson was no better. That he was worried and that he was suffering much was evident. He was not asking so many questions about the work as he had at first. Then Wally noticed that he was writing checks without verifying Pete's calculations.

Once as the sick man started to write a check Wally said, "Pete made a mistake there."

"What's that? Where?"

"Right here—that isn't right."

Peterson took a pencil and worked over the figures. "So it isn't—didn't notice that—careless—twenty dollars out. How did you chance to see it?"

"Oh, figures are easy for me—I see everything about figures."

"That so? Why didn't you say so before? Add, subtract, multiply, divide?"

"Sure, that's nothin'."

"Here, then, foot these columns—just going to do it myself."

Wally picked up a pencil and quickly footed the long columns, setting down the totals with such rapidity that Peterson watched him in amazement.

"All right, Wally." And when he was alone again

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heat buyer laboriously added up the columns. "Well, George! Think of that!" he exclaimed. "Every one of us—no mistakes. Wouldn't have supposed it! Well,

the next day he said to Wally: "Going to have you over Pete's calculations—eyes hurt me—can't see—head aches all the time—feel bad. Can you write?"

"I guess you can make out these bills—cars of wheat delivered—I'll help you. Sit down at that table—here."

"Good work!" he cried when he had examined Wally's work. "Well, I declare! Better than I can do—poor old scrawler—nervous—shaky."

Under Peterson's supervision Wally was soon doing all the heat buyer's work with the exception of signing the checks. But they alone knew of this. Peterson insisted on secrecy.

"I won't let anybody know—won't do—farmers take me afraid to take my checks. Be all right soon—had trouble before. Keep it quiet."

But he did not grow better—he showed no signs of improvement.

The day he called Wally back as he was leaving the office. "Big draft here—to-day's mail—Spencer & Banks will get it to the bank—need some cash, too. You go to Wheaton to-morrow. I'll send Katy to fetch Amy home—she'll help me while you're gone—understands about the girl."

The following morning after the day's work was well under way Wally hitched Peterson's horse to the buggy and started for Wheaton, driving past the elevator to ask Mr. Wooler if he had the horse harnessed properly and fastened to the buggy as it should be. At Wheaton he delivered the draft Peterson had given him and cashed it, made payable to him, for two hundred dollars. He called on the profane engineer at the flour mill, but

for some reason found him stale and unprofitable, and cut his visit short. When he thought his horse had rested sufficiently he started back across the prairie.

His mind was full of the work he had in hand—there was so much to do. He rejoiced in the fact that he could help Peterson, could do Peterson's work. He laughed as he remembered how, a few days before, the wheat buyer had given him a great stack of canceled checks and his bank book and told him to verify the bank's figures and see if everything was correct. The accounts had balanced to a penny. In his pocket was another bunch of cancelations which the cashier at the bank had given him. He anticipated the pleasure he would have in going over them, arranging them, talking with Peterson about them. Figures, figures—it was fun to work with figures!

It was dusk when he came up from the barn to Peterson's house. Miss Creeth met him on the little veranda.

"Good evening, Mr. Wellington Gay," she said, smiling.

"Good evenin', Miss Amy Creeth," he returned, smiling back at her.

Her face suddenly became grave. "I'm afraid Mr. Peterson is a very sick man," she said.

"I'm sure he is."

"He ought to have a doctor, but he says Doctor Holmes is the only one that knows his case, and Doctor Holmes is in California. He has had these spells before, I know, but he is worse this time, much worse."

"I reckon he ought to have a doctor, all right. I'm doin' all I can to help him, and I'll keep on doin' all I can."

"Yes, yes, he has told me about you. He says he couldn't get along without you. Where in the world did you learn your arithmetic, Mr. Gay?"

"At school, I guess. Oh, I guess I didn't either—I always like to fool with figures, and it was always easy."

"And your beautiful handwriting?"

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"That was easy too."

"You are remarkable."

Wally looked away. "That your horse and buggy over there?" he asked.

"Yes, and I must be going home! I have to help mother with the chores yet. You'll send for me any time you need me, won't you?"

"Oh, sure."

"And you're coming to Sunday school, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am—as soon as I get a chance."

"I'm glad. Good-by, Mr. Gay." She took a step forward and held out her hand.

Wally grasped it, shivered slightly, tingled all over, and stammered, "Er—good-by, Miss Creeth."

He watched her untie her horse and climb into the buggy, wondering if he shouldn't have assisted her. He did not move until the rattle of the wheels of her buggy had died away in the dusky distance. Then he moved toward the door.

"A darned nice girl, if I do say it!" he whispered.

CHAPTER V

WHEAT OR STEEL

THE days ran by. Wheat continued to pour into the bins of the elevator, and it continued to pour out of them into the cars that Wally sweated down the rough uneven tracks to the loading chute. There was no rest for him. His hard work and his long hours were beginning to tell on him—he was getting thin and haggard.

A young Swede dropped off a loitering freight car one morning and spoke to him about a job. He hired the man at once, agreeing to pay him four dollars a day after the job hunter had refused three dollars and three dollars and a half. He put him to work, then went and told Peterson what he had done.

"Fine, Wally, fine! Needed more help—too much for you. Four dollars—hum—not too much if he's a good hand. I raised your pay—some time ago—forgot to mention it—give it to you in a bunch—any time—ask for it." And the wheat buyer nodded a friendly nod at him.

Wally made another trip to Wheaton, carrying another draft to the bank and bringing out more cash. Miss Creeth again stayed with Peterson and assisted him through the day. Again she and Wally talked together in the dusk, and again she shook hands with him when she left him. The next day, at Peterson's request, he paid Ike Dooler and Pete Peddy their wages, gave old Katy what was due her, met some bills presented by the station agent and settled up at the general

store where Peterson traded. His own pay he did not draw.

"Guess I'll leave it with you," he told his employer. "I haven't got no use for it here now. I'll get it some day."

"All right, Wally; it's safe."

Old Katy came to his door one morning before he had risen and called him.

"He's worse," she said shortly, and went away.

He hurried to Peterson's room.

"Done, Wally. Done for good!" groaned the sick man. "Can't move—look here!" His hands lay on the bed cover. The forefinger of each hand worked up and down—a very little. "That's all—muscles dead—down and out."

Wally was frightened at such helplessness, and he trembled as he gazed at the unfortunate man.

"Now what?" went on Peterson. "Can't write my name—can't sign checks—have to send for that nephew! Hate to—don't like him—can't trust him! Got to do it—only relative—got to let him in on the business! Send him a telegram, Wally—Hotel Northern, Fargo."

"Say, I'll sign your checks for you!" said Wally quickly.

Surprise showed in Peterson's face. Then he smiled. "Oh, couldn't do that, Wally. What do you mean?"

"I never seen any writin' yet that I couldn't write just like it—exactly like it if I tried."

Peterson mused for several moments. "Oh, no—can't be done—impossible—never heard of such a thing! No, no, send that telegram—Edwin Peterson—tell him to come—say I'm sick."

"All right," said Wally. "Say, how about a doctor?"

"No, no—Doc Holmes back soon—he knows my case. Been like this before—never so bad. Don't need medicine—Sulphur Springs—California—that'll fix me up—always has. Send the wire."

Wally left the house and started for the telegraph

station, but he had gone only a little way when old Katy came running after him, calling him back: "He wants you, quick!"

He returned to Peterson's room.

"Been thinking it over—might try it—don't want Ed win here! Three weeks more and we're through. Might manage it. You stick up a notice to-day—'No more wheat bought after the fifteenth.' Try my name—get an old check."

Wally sat down at a table with one of Peterson's canceled checks before him. He copied the signature a dozen times on a piece of paper, tore this up, and on another piece wrote the name three times. This he held before Peterson's eyes.

The sick man looked at it in silence for several moments, his eyes going from one to another of the signatures. "By George!" he exclaimed. "Couldn't tell it myself! You're a skilled forger, Wally. Sign it to fifteen or twenty blank checks—let me see each one."

The checks were signed and held before his eyes. He approved each of them.

"All right—go ahead—same as before. But mum, Wally—mum as death. Funny business, this—mustn't let anybody know—just you and I—nobody else—understand? Approved forgery—ha! Keep Edwin out of it—finish up—go to California—both of us, eh? Soon be all right again."

John Peterson continued to purchase wheat, and the farmers selling it were paid with forged checks which they carried to the Wheaton bank and cashed, the cashier giving not a second glance at the well-known signature.

Wally now took charge of the telegraphic quotations of wheat, which came each afternoon, read a portion of the market page in the daily paper to Peterson every day, and opened his mail, holding the most important of the communications before the eyes of the helpless man.

"Got some letters to write," Peterson announced one

morning. "New job for you—longhand stenographer—ha!"

"I can't write no letters for you," said Wally. "I'm a rotten speller—never could spell. I can sign your name or make out them bills or fuss with figures, but I can't write no letter—not your kind. Ask Miss Creeth."

"Good idea. Send old Katy after her."

Miss Creeth came. "I'll draft the letters," she said, "but Wally—Mr. Gay must copy them. I don't write a business hand—he does. They would produce a better effect in his handwriting, don't you think?"

Peterson agreed with her, and while Wally went to the telegraph office and freight station she wrote several letters. When he returned and began copying them she sat down at the table near him.

"You are just wonderful," she whispered. "He has told me everything, all that you are doing for him—about the checks too."

He flushed with pleasure. "Aw, that ain't nothin'," he mumbled.

"Yes, but it is! And he thinks you are—but I'll tell you that some other time."

She started to whisper something else but just then Wally smiled at her. Her cheeks mantled, and she rose and went to Peterson's bedside.

Wally finished the letters and hurried away to the elevator.

He was working harder now than at any time before. The wheat was flowing in in greater quantities, the growers wanting to get their grain to the elevator and sold before it closed down, to avoid the longer haul to Wheaton and other points. He was tired all the while—he could not get rested; he was losing flesh every day; he was hollow-eyed, thin-faced.

"You're killing yourself," said Miss Creeth one day as she sat by him while he copied a letter she had written. "You're working yourself to death!"

He laughed. "Don't you believe it! I'm all right.

We'll be through before long. And maybe I ain't goin' to rest up some! I'm goin' to sleep for a week without wakin' up."

On the evening of the fifteenth of the month Pete Peddy weighed and graded his last load of wheat, made his last entry in his books, handed them over to Wally and went home. He too was tired. Ike Dooler, much though he wanted to, did not draw his fires—there were a few cars of wheat in the elevator that must be loaded out. Wally climbed down into each of the ten deep bins, as they were emptied, and scraped down the wheat that had hung on the slanting floors and in the corners, and two days later old Ike throttled down his wheezing engine with a thankful sigh. They were through!

"Good work! Good work!" laughed Peterson. "We did it—you did it, Wally—you!" He was jubilant. "Look here! Getting better—be all right now—look at that!" He could move his hands about on the coverlet, and all his fingers worked freely. "Doc Holmes back next week—fix me up. Knew we could do it—kept Edwin out of it—glad of that. By George, Wally, you did it! Pretty cute, eh? Well, better go to Wheaton to-morrow—another draft to bank—mine this time—made some money this season. Want your pay now? Write your own check—sign my name to it—get your money—ha!"

"Not yet," replied Wally. "I don't need much money here."

"Any time—say so. Going to California—soon as I'm up—want you to go with me—take care of me. Want to go?"

"Why, yes, I guess so. Oh, I don't know."

"Think about it—got to have you—treat you right—pay you well."

Wally went to Wheaton the next day. After he had transacted the business Peterson had intrusted to him he went to a hotel, hired a room and went to bed. He was very tired, and he slept until late in the afternoon.

When he went to the livery stable where he had left his horse and buggy he found the horse was sick. The stable man told him the animal could not travel that night. He returned to the hotel and went to bed again.

When he woke late next morning he felt thoroughly rested—he was again his old self. The stable man advised him to stay in Wheaton as long as he could that day, on account of the sick horse, and he did not start back until the middle of the afternoon.

Then he drove slowly, letting the animal choose its pace.

The grim-visaged old Katy was standing in the black shadow of the barn as he drove up. "He's dead," she said, and with a sobbing moan walked away toward the house.

He trembled, as his heart went cold in his breast. Peterson dead! He could not believe it. He hurriedly stabled the horse and then ran up to Peterson's room. Where the bed had stood there was now a coffin, and in it lay the corpse of John Peterson. Wally dropped down at the table where he had made out so many bills, written so many letters, figured out the cost of so many bushels of wheat, signed John Peterson's name so many times, and wept long and bitterly.

That night he stayed with Pete Pddy. The next morning he met and talked with the undertaker, who came from a neighboring village.

"I have wired to his nephew," said that gentleman. "He will be here this morning on the west-bound train. I suppose he will have his uncle buried at the Dodder Creek Cemetery. Doctor Holmes got back from California night before last and he came over here with me yesterday, when the old woman telephoned me. I think everything we have done will be all right. Too bad about John—he was one of the county's best citizens."

Wally was at the station when the west-bound passenger train came in. Two men alighted from it, one of them a young man of thirty or thirty-five, flashily

dressed, smoking a cigarette and carrying an expensive traveling bag; the other an old man, gray haired and stooped. The younger man walked rapidly away in the direction of Peterson's house, the older approached Wally.

"Young man, do you know where I will find John Peterson, the wheat man?" he asked.

"You won't find him," replied Wally; "he's dead."

"Dead! John Peterson dead!" exclaimed the old man. "Well! Well! I am astonished to hear such news! When did he die? Tell me about him."

He listened while Wally told him of Peterson's illness and sudden death.

"This distresses me more than I can say. Too bad, too bad! Why, I've known John Peterson for fifteen years or more, and a finer man I didn't number among all my acquaintances. You say you have been working for him? Do you happen to know who did his clerical work for him this summer?"

"I did—most of it."

"Oh, you did? Well, young man, I want to tell you that we have never had our correspondence and our accounting business with Peterson come through in such excellent shape as it has been coming the greater part of this season. I am Spencer, of Spencer & Banks, you know—at Buffalo. Peterson was very clumsy with pen and pencil, and we often had difficulty in making out his figures and in reading his letters, and more than once serious mistakes were made when we misread something he had sent us. Your work has been the admiration of our office force. How long have you been with him?"

This question led to another and another, and soon Wally was talking steadily, telling in detail to the mild-mannered white-haired man, toward whom his heart had warmed, his experience with John Peterson. And Randolph Spencer sat very still while he talked, listening to a story that caused his old pulses to quicken their beats.

When it was ended he rose and began pacing up and down the station platform.

"Well, now, I declare!" he muttered. "Remarkable! Never heard of such a thing! I believe every word he has spoken! Well! Well!" He looked at the young man sitting quietly on the baggage truck. "He'll do! Made of the right sort of stuff! He's got the right kind of an eye—it looks at you, meets yours squarely. He will develop into something worth while. Well, I must say! If the ending wasn't so tragical it would be laughable. Poor Peterson—how he would have delighted to tell me this story!"

He walked back to the baggage truck. "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know—get a job somewhere, I guess. I'm broke. If I can get what I've earned here——"

"You'll have trouble there, I'm afraid. I've heard Peterson talk about his nephew, and he never said anything very good about him. Peterson would have done handsomely by you, I know, but you'll do well now if you succeed in getting what you actually earned at your first wage rate. Suppose you figure it up and give me your claim to collect for you. I'm something of a lawyer, and I'm going to be in Wheaton and its vicinity for a few days. I expect I can get it quicker than you could, and without any expense to you."

Wally agreed to this. "All right," he said, "I don't know nothin' about how to go about it, except to go and ask this nephew of his."

"That wouldn't get you much. I'll take care of the matter. And now, something else. I've been thinking that I'd like to have you in Buffalo, working for Spencer & Banks. There's a little office adjoining mine where you would fit in nicely. The young man I had in there left me a while ago. Your salary to start with will be satisfactory, I'm sure, and it will grow better as you care to make it better. What do you say?"

"I'll go," replied Wally. "But I'm broke! How am I to get there?"

"I'll take care of that. I'll buy you a ticket to Buffalo, let you have twenty-five dollars or so, and give you a letter to Mr. Banks. He'll take charge of you until I get back there. That's the way we'll handle that. Now, you want to go to Peterson's funeral, no doubt. So do I. We'll go over to the house and make inquiries. Too bad about Peterson."

Together they went to the church at Dodder Creek, where the funeral was held the next day. Wally saw Miss Creeth in company with an elderly lady, whom he took to be her mother. He found no opportunity to speak to her—or thought he didn't—and he wanted to tell her he was going away—he wanted to tell her good-by. He liked Miss Creeth.

Edwin Peterson came seeking him. "I understand you know a good deal about my uncle's business. Let's hear something. What about his—"

"Find out for yourself!" broke in Wally. "Everything's straight!" And he walked away.

He was climbing aboard the passenger train that was to carry him eastward the following afternoon, when he caught sight of a woman running down the road leading to the station. As the train was moving off, and before he had entered the coach, she came hurrying round the corner of the station. It was Miss Creeth. Some sudden impulse prompted him to leave the train, and he started forward to run down the steps, when the brakeman slammed shut the doors.

"Good-by, Amy!" he shouted to her. "Good-by!" She saw him and waved her handkerchief.

"Say, Leatherlung, what you tryin' to do—crack my eardrums?" snarled the brakeman.

"A fine little girl, all right, all right, all right!" he sighed as he dropped into a seat.

At Chicago he learned that he had three hours to wait *between trains*. He left the depot, wandered down a

street, passed a noisy pool room, turned back and went in. An affable young man proposed a game of pool, to which he agreed. While they played there rose a dispute among some other players; blows were struck, and in the rush he was jostled roughly. When he reached for his purse to pay for the game, which he had lost, he found it missing. He discovered some loose change in one of his pockets, paid for the game with that, and had ten cents left. He spent the dime for a sandwich.

"Broke again, travelin' again with empty stomach and pockets!" he laughed. "I need a keeper. But I've still got my ticket to Buffalo, and to Buffalo I'll go."

He left Chicago on an afternoon train, traveling in a day coach. Mr. Spencer had told him to take a sleeper out of Chicago. When night came he stretched out comfortably on two seats turned together and quickly fell asleep.

Some time in the night he woke and found that the train was standing still. Men were going out of the car and returning, and he heard them talking about a wreck ahead. He inquired of a passenger what time it was—it was nearly midnight. He decided he would go outside and look about.

As he stepped to the ground he stopped suddenly and began to sniff the air. It was a foul rank odor that assailed his nostrils, but he found it familiarly delicious. He sniffed again and again; his pulses began to leap, and with all his speed he ran through the darkness to the end of the train and crossed the track behind it. Then he laughed, laughed long and loud, and struck his hands together. A high board fence was in front of him, and towering over it he saw rows of tall black stacks; a hundred well-known noises beat upon his ears; the sky above him was rosy red.

"O Lord!" he gasped. "It's Steelburg! Steelburg! Yeow-yeow!" He yelled for pure happiness.

He applied his eye to a crack in the fence and looked straight into the rod mill, the old rod mill where he had

once worked. He saw the red rods looping and twisting and writhing over the floors; saw the roll hands tossing them about with their long-handled tongs; saw the hooker boys tugging at them on the inclines.

"Yip-yeow!"

He turned and sprinted along the track, keeping close to the high fence; ran for a quarter of a mile, rounded a corner and looked down into Vinegar Gully. He paused and listened. He heard a man singing in a loud coarse voice. The singing ceased and there came an applause of yells and laughter.

"It's Bulger the Bat at The Morgue!" he chuckled.

He made as though he would go down into the gully, then faced about and again ran along the fence. At a particularly dark spot that was not touched by the searching rays of light from the row of arc lamps that swung above the fence he stopped and began working at a loose board. In a minute there was a hole in the fence before him. Many a time had he gone through that hole, just as he was going through it now, unseen by the watchmen at the gate a hundred yards away. He stood in the yards of Steelburg Mills.

Before his eager eyes greenish-yellow tongues of flame were playing above the buildings where the Bessemer converters swung; a dull red glow hung about the bases of the blast furnaces; he saw the long white bars of steel racing back and forth in the bar mills; and over in one of the Open Hearth buildings he watched a huge ladle of just-tapped steel starting slowly up from the pit, waves of creamy slag slopping over its curving sides.

Something stirred in him, something came up into his throat and choked him, something like a mist floated before his vision. "Aw, it's great!" he whispered.

Keeping well in the shadows of the black buildings, he moved down through the yard, pausing now and then to sniff the malodorous air, to listen to the bedlam of sound, to watch some mighty machine at its herculean

labor, to chuckle, to laugh, to mutter, "Aw, it's great, great!"

So he came to the ingot mill and stood back of it, in the shadows behind the cooling tank, where he waited, waited until a cloud of steam from the tank came blowing over him. Into its white depths he plunged, and unseen of any eyes he came into the mill building and to the incline leading into the scale hole, down which he darted.

He peeped into the den. Nicker and Dicker sat on their old black bench, asleep, their heads dropping forward on their breasts. He grinned, tiptoed past them, and took down a dirty greasy suit of overalls that hung on the concrete wall. From Dicker's bald head he lifted a torn and battered cloth cap. Then he tiptoed out, and behind a wall donned the grimy suit and set the battered cap on his head. From the lunch pails of the two laborers he ate a substantial meal. Beneath the rolls he found a wheelbarrow loaded with scale. He quietly pushed it to the foot of the incline. Then he dipped up a handful of the scale and threw it to strike on the wall above the sleepers' heads and rattle down upon them. He chuckled when he saw them stir, straighten up and rub their eyes.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, I was dreamin' of Wally Gay, dogged if I wasn't! Dreamed he come down here all in white an' pointed a pink finger at me an' said, 'Damn you, Dicker, what'd you do it for?' Seen him plain as I see you, Nicker. Jogs-jolly, say, boys, I'm thinkin' of Wally all the time, eatin' or sleepin', awake or anything. What d'ye s'pose, Nicker, ever become of Wally?"

"Lord knows," mumbled Nicker sleepily.

"Nicker, I'll never be able to die a easy death just because of puttin' that dope in the booze. D'ye remember, Nicker, how he set here that night? It was right where I'm settin' now.

"Hot in here," he said.

"Of course it's hot in here," I said. "Why shouldn't

it be hot in here?" I said. And then he got up and——"

His speech was killed by a sudden intake of his breath. His body stiffened and a queer sound came from his throat.

"Golly, Nicker, look! Look!" he whispered with dry lips, seizing his companion's arm. "Look, Nicker!"

Nicker raised his eyes. "Oh—h—h!" he groaned, shrinking back.

Up the incline marched a sturdy figure in grimy working clothes, pushing a heavy wheelbarrow filled with roll scale. The face was very white, and the hands that grasped the handles of the wheelbarrow were white, unlike the hands of scale wheelers. The eyes in the white face looked straight ahead, glancing neither to the right nor to the left.

A cloud of steam came blowing into the mill from the cooling tank outside. It drifted down the incline, enveloped it and hung there for a minute. When it floated on the figure with the barrow was not to be seen.

"Golly, let's go!" whispered Dicker. He leaped up and darted toward the exit.

"Wait, Dicker! Wait for me!" cried Nicker.

Out of the hole, up the incline, into the mill, past a crowd of staring, wondering workers, through the mill and out into the yard they raced, Nicker treading on the heels of Dicker. Nor did they halt their flight until they stood at the farther end of the yard, behind a line of freight cars.

"Jogs-jolly, say, boys, what—what was that?" panted Dicker.

"His ghost, Dicker, nothin' else!" gasped Nicker.

"We're doomed! He's after us, Nicker! I knowed it to-night when I dreamed about him pointin' that finger at me an' sayin', 'Damn you, Dicker, what'd you do it for?' That dope in the whisky killed him! Lord help me an' you!"

"I wisht I'd never come back here to work."

"Me too."

"Dicker, you got your bottle with you?"

"Yes. I allays carry it in my pants pocket, ever since that night."

"Lemme have it. So help me, Dicker, I never took a drink in these here yards before since I worked here, it bein' against the rules. But now—my nerves are shot."

He put the bottle to his lips, threw back his head and closed his eyes.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, don't forget I've got nerves too!"

"Well, Nicker, where do we go now?" demanded Dicker, after he had sent an empty bottle crashing against a box car.

"Our clothes——"

"Clothes? Why, man, I wouldn't go back there after my clothes if I didn't have nothin' on but my black string tie! Me for The Morgue! If they don't like these here workin' rags let 'em lump 'em!"

"So say I!"

"Sure! Come on!"

In amazement Wally had watched the mad flight of the two old men. He had tried to stop them, called to them, run after them, but the mill men caught sight of him and came crowding about him, shaking his hands, asking questions, shoving him this way and that, rubbing his clean face with dirty hands.

It was a glorious half night for him. He had never been happier. And he never toiled harder. For he found the work in the scale hole had been sadly slacked, and he set to work to clean the place up as he knew it should be cleaned. And there was much trouble in the mill that night, and more than once he went above to sweat and strain with the men there over red-hot bars of steel.

He was hurrying across the yard just at daylight, with the six o'clock whistles shrilling and shrieking and bellowing all over Steelburg, when he met Ackerman.

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The yard superintendent's face showed signs of worry. Ackerman was rarely seen in the yards at such an early hour.

"Hello!" said Ackerman, stopping and staring.

"Hello, yourself, so early in the mornin'!" returned Wally.

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, off on a little trip. Well, how's tricks?"

"Bad, Wally, bad! You know that big sewer back of the rod mill? Well, it's blocked up, blocked up in bad shape. I've been working at it for two days and can't get it opened up. The engine room up there is flooded, the water has backed up in the condenser house —things in a horrible shape. I can't get a man that's worth a rotten prune to work on it. If I had you just about three hours——"

"I'll open it up for you! I know that sewer all right—worked at it lots of times. You've got to get right down in that catch basin with both feet and all four hands, when that there sewer gets blocked. It's some job, all right. Sure, I'll open it up."

"Say, will you Wally? If you will, I'll——"

"Sure thing! I only worked half a turn last night. I'm not tired. Where's your hip boots?"

"You come along with me, Wally—they're right over here in Jackman's shanty." And Ackerman took a firm grip on the young man's arm and led him away.

And when the noon whistle blew that day a dozen applauding hypocrites were gathered about the catch basin of the big sewer back of the rod mill, shouting down encouragement and rough jests to a man who worked waist deep in roiling, filthy water, who paused now and then in his work to turn a smiling face up at them and answer their rough jests with still rougher jests.

And a shipping clerk hurrying across the yard paused to thrust his head in at a window of a storekeeper and ask: "What d'ye know about that, Tubby? Wally Gay's

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got back! Over here now, back of the rod mill, cleaning out a sewer. Been all over the West and says he didn't run across any dump that would near come up to Steelburg. What d'ye know about that? Got your spit-quick plug with you? Just a nibble. Guess I'll go over and take a slant at him. Been working with wheat out there but says he prefers steel. What d'ye know about that, Tubby?"

CHAPTER VI

A NEW OLD MAN

STEELBURG MILLS had a new Old Man; the old Old Man had left, quit, resigned—gone to take a bigger, better job with a bigger, better company. That's what he had said, anyway. They all say that when they leave, quit, resign: "Going to take a bigger, better job with a bigger, better company." Quite so! It's surprising, it's really astonishing how many bigger, better jobs with bigger, better companies there are waiting for bigger, better men.

Steelburg Mills was glad the old Old Man had gone. From Dick Sloddy, the pit-cover boy at the bloomer, earning his twelve cents an hour, to Jerry Crane, the assistant roller at the rod mill, dragging down his twelve dollars a day, Steelburg Mills was glad. Perhaps that is why the mills coughed up twenty-eight hundred dollars to buy the departing Old Man a present—because they were glad he was leaving. And perhaps that wasn't the reason. Maybe Lafe Murdock had something to do with it.

Lafe Murdock was assistant general manager at Steelburg Mills. Lafe didn't like old Teller any more than Clancy or Smith or Olinsky did, but to watch him a while you'd think he loved him—always dogging his steps, meeting him at the gate when he would come into the yards, whispering in his ear, taking him by the arm when he was crossing a dangerous spot about the mills, running to meet him with an umbrella when it rained, smoking the same brand of cigars he smoked, copying his

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clothes—he was a prize lick-spittle. The way Lafe Murdock hung round and honeyed round the Old Man made everybody tired.

Lafe knew that he wasn't going to be the new Old Man, not if he had been A. G. M. for ten years; he knew that even the chances for his keeping hold of what he had at Steelburg Mills weren't very fat, with old Teller gone. So with an eye to the future—there might be a place for him with Teller in that bigger, better company—he engineered the raising and the spending of the testimonial fund.

Lafe was necked like a bull, lipped like a horse, browed like a rooster, eyed like a pig, mouthed like a hippo. He wasn't to blame for these physical idiosyncrasies, of course, but he was to blame for the two rows of fourteen gold teeth that lighted up the front of his gape. He might have grown a beard, raised a mustache, affected the need of horn-rimmed glasses or worn a stand-up collar, but he didn't—not much! Lafe liked Lafe as he was.

With certain employees about Steelburg Mills Lafe had a way; and with certain other employees there he didn't have a way. It was from the first of these that he pulled the twenty-eight hundred.

He'd go up to Yakabowski, sledging in a slag hole or shoveling in a scale pit or digging in a sewer ditch, and say: "Look here, John, the big boss is going to leave us and we want to make him a little present. How much are you going to give—two dollars, hey?" And Yakabowski looking up from his work, and catching a glimpse of those fourteen gold teeth, the bull neck, the pig eyes, and so forth, would say promptly: "Oh, shee-ure! Two dollar? Dot's all right, Meester Murdock!" And then he'd start in to cuss away and loaf away five dollars' worth of the company's time because he had to give up nearly a day's pay. Lafe had a way with fellows like Yakabowski.

But when he'd approach Jones, melting steel at the Open Hearth or rolling rods at the rod mill or heating ingots at the rail mill, and attempt to touch him for five dollars, and Jones would look him straight in the pig eyes, unscared by the neck, the lip or the gold teeth, and would bellow out "What's that? Me give my money to buy a present for that old red-necked something-or-other? Not on your life-belt!" Lafe would saunter on. He didn't have a way with fellows like Jones, somehow or other.

But he raised twenty-eight hundred dollars, for Steelburg Mills employs an army of men, and Lafe had a way with a whole lot of them, and he and Benny Bean and Joe Easley constituted the committee that went downtown to buy the present. Present? It was presents. For they found they were unable to spend twenty-eight hundred dollars on one present. So they bought a yellow diamond the size of a pullet's egg, to be set in a tiger's-claw ring, for twelve hundred; a big yellow-diamond shirt stud for five hundred; and then they wore themselves out buying gimcracks, kickshaws and gewgaws with the remaining eleven hundred. But they saved enough from it to purchase for old Teller's wife a bunch of flowers so big it required two men to carry it.

Lafe engineered the testimonial meeting, too, and succeeded in getting together a fair-sized mob, over in the open yard back of the Bessemer, for not only those with whom he had a way came but many of those with whom he didn't have a way were there also. They didn't want to miss anything good. Lafe made the presentation speech, and it was mellow as mush all the way through. Old Teller made a mealy-mouthed rejoinder, thanking the mills for their loyalty to him through the many years he had been associated with them, wishing them good luck and Godspeed, and promising all of them good jobs if they ever needed or wanted good jobs. Then Lafe called for three cheers, and mighty sneery little cheers they were. After which old Teller

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loaded up his plunder and departed, and the mob scattered.

Out of sight behind the blast furnaces, Jones, who was heading one division of the dispersing mob, stopped and held up his hand. "Fellers," he said, "I propose that we give three bustin' cheers and a tiger because the old red-necked something-or-other is gone!"

They gave them, and there was nothing sneery or little about them either.

A shipping clerk hurrying by the place at the time, stopped and with enthusiasm joined in the lung exercise, after which he hurried on, crossed a depressed track, ran up a long flight of stairs, hastily descended another long flight, and rushed into the tin shanty of the stout, very stout stock clerk of Susie Blast Furnace, Randolph U. Jackson, known about the mills only as Tootsy.

"What d'ye know about that, Tootsy?" demanded the shipping clerk, dropping into a chair by the stock clerk's desk. "Honest, now, Tootsy, what d'ye know about it? Here I've just been over watching Lafe Murdock present the present to that old stiff of a Teller, and say, it took two cabs to haul the junk away! What d'ye know about that? Honest—two cabloads! And a bunch of posies for Ma Teller that Benny Bean and Joe Easley could hardly lift! Twenty-eight hundred dollars of us dubs' coin to buy presents for that old pot-bellied crab!

"I had to cough up three plunks myself, and I suppose they tapped you for two or three, eh? But what could a fellow do? Here comes that Klondike-faced Lafe Murdock and says: 'Well, how much for the Old Man's present, Bob? About three dingers, hey?' And I says: 'Sure, Mr. Murdock, glad to give it. Mr. Teller's been a fine Old Man.' What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? Got your spit-quick fine-cut with you? Let's have a pinch. What'd happened if I hadn't coughed? Why, Lafe would have had me on the tramp in no time. When a fellow with Lafe's title gives you a gentle hint that it's time to dig up it's time to dig up. Isn't it so,

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Tootsy? It's all right enough if you've got a good job and guts, and don't care which way the wind blows your hat, and know how to sling the come-back.

"Take Bixby, over at the Bessemer. Bixby told Lafe where to head in when he went to touch him for a donation. Did he tell him? He certainly did! But Bixby doesn't care, you know—he doesn't have to care. And they can't afford to lose a man like Bixby. But reflect on it, Tootsy—twenty-eight hundred berries! What d'ye know about it?

"And just tell me what old Tellerinsky ever did for any man about this dump, except Lafe Murdock, a half dozen or so of his nephews and cousins, and some sons of big guys that he played croquet with up on the Heights? Why, man, he wouldn't give a fellow a pleasant look—not if it was Christmas morning and he'd hung his sock up the night before and got it full. I heard Al Dickey say once that he'd go in the cold-storage business if he knew he could hire old Tell, for he'd just have him walk up and down in the storage building and wouldn't have to use any ice. What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? Pretty good, eh? Ever hear about the time he drove the blue drake in the duck race, with pink ribbons for lines, at the society stir-off his wife gave up on the Heights? That's good chow for thought too; but more of that anon, as Shakespeare says.

"Nice day, isn't it? Take the case of Wally Gay. There's a deucedly clever chap. He's sharp, he's cute, he's nobody's damn fool. But old Teller wouldn't give him any show—I should say not! McNutt and Devoe and Belmore all spoke a good word for Wally, and I'll be danged if Teller didn't order him sent down to the scale hole at the ingot mill to work with old Nicker and Dicker. Tellerinsky figured it out that Nicker and Dicker were nearly due to kick the pail, and then he'd have Wally, the goat, down there, all broken in on the dirtiest, toughest job on the dump, to take Nicker's

and Dicker's places—one man for two, see? What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? Wally always was the mills' goat. Ackerman fitted a saddle to him and everybody rode him. Some of these days Wally Gay's going to turn over, wake up, and give some of these wisenstein's in this plant a jolt that will jar them.

"Then Ackerman took him and made a roustabout of him. I'll be durned if it wasn't a shame the way Ackerman handled him, but Wally didn't seem to care. I guess I was the first one to discover that Wally wasn't all dub. I found out that he could figure and write like a machine. Honest, Tootsy, the way he could handle the figures and sling a pen with ink on it was a caution—regular wizard. I spoke to Calla Lily, our cultured chief clerk, about giving him a chance in the shipping department, but Calla Lily said he was too coarse, too unrefined. What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? Wouldn't it give you a pain in the necktie?

"Take me, Tootsy. I've been working for this shebang for eight years and better. Why haven't I got somewhere in that time? Simply because I wasn't refined enough for Calla Lily. And I know the very day I stewed my gosling too. You know, Tootsy, how dirty that part of the yard is where my office stands, and how the dirt and dust is always blowing through the doors and windows? Well, I sent in a requisition one day for a little two-gallon sprinkling can, so that I could sprinkle the floor now and then and lay the dust. Calla Lily turned down the requisition and wouldn't let the storehouse send it over—said he had to keep down expenses. What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? Well, one morning I was busy at my desk, and I was shooting some pretty snappy tobacco on the floor—old Slobowsky had forgotten to bring back the cuspiters after sweeping out—when Calla Lily blew in. 'Robert,' he said, 'that is a most reprehensible practice of yours—expectorating on the floor. I shouldn't think you would countenance it.'

"I came back: 'But I sent you a requisition, Mr. Calla, for a sprinkling can to use to settle the dust round here, and you turned the requisition down. I've simply got to keep the dust laid in this dump or I'll choke and not be able to get out the work.'

"Tootsy, I've stood still as a tombstone ever since that day! What d'ye know about it? Just like Wally Gay—no more chance of getting ahead than a jack rabbit with three legs bit off by a bear.

"Well, I've got to go—got a raft of work ahead of me. Maybe the new Old Man will be different from Teller. I hope so. They tell me he's as plain as an old felt boot. He was here last week, sizing the dump up. He met Dave Tinker down at the pig machine and asked him for a chew. Dave pulled out a sack of Puddlers' Perfection. It's the punkest junk a man ever tried to masticate, Tootsy—leave it alone!

"'Why, I used Puddlers' Perfection for years,' said the new Old Man, 'and did well on it too. I always knew there was a lot of cigar stubs mixed up in it, but that didn't worry me. Then I got hold of two or three packages that had stubs in them that hadn't even had the smoked ends clipped off, so I quit it. I didn't kick on the snipes, but I did think they ought to clip 'em at least.' He stuffed his trap full, handed back the package to Dave, and went on.

"What d'ye know about that, Tootsy? I believe he'll make a hit. Imagine old Tellerinsky saying a thing like that to Dave Tinker or to me or to you! I hope he makes a clean-up here. I'd just like to see Lafe Murdock get one good bust, blast me if I wouldn't! Maybe a fellow who deserves a show will get it now. You bet, I believe he's going to be all right. Goodlow is his name—comes from Pittsburgh. Well, I've got to lope on. But cogitate on it, Tootsy, cogitate: Twenty-eight hundred bucks out of us suckers' pockets to buy a present for that old fat slob of a Tellerinsky! What d'ye know about that?"

Goodlow's secretary knew that some one had entered his office, had quietly crossed the room, and was now standing before his desk. But he did not look up from the newspaper he was reading. Film News was exceptionally interesting that morning. As secretary to the general manager of Steelburg Mills, Bridges had his troubles, and not the least of them was trying to make people understand that the mills were not open to the public. Here was another petitioner for a pass; he was certain of it, so he kept on reading. He had to say "No, sir!" and "No, madam!" so many times every day that he had come to hate his callers. For people would come to Steelburg, hoping to be permitted to go inside the great steel plant—all sorts and conditions of people, men and women of all ages, of all professions, of all degrees of inquisitiveness and taciturnity, and wisdom and foolishness, and politeness and impoliteness.

Bridges could not understand this crazy desire of people. Why should they want to see the steel mills? He himself could find nothing of interest about them—a place of noise and dirt and smoke and danger; a place of white lakes of bubbling steel, or red pools of molten iron, of glowing stacks of bars and blooms and ingots; a place of grinding wheels and rumbling rolls and thundering engines; a place of grimy, sweaty, hard-faced men. Bah! Why didn't they visit those places where their real interests lay? Lawyers should visit courthouses, school-teachers school buildings, doctors hospitals, bank clerks banks. But no, they all came here, bothering him. Here was another one of them! Let him wait! Let him—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but could you tell me if your company has in its employ a man by the name of Wellington Gay?"

Bridges started, dropped his newspaper and looked up. A pleasant-faced, white-haired old man stood before his desk. Bridges was disturbed; he wished he had looked up at first, for evidently this was not one of his tormentors.

"I cannot answer your question at once," he replied,

"but I can find out in a moment or two. Just take a chair, please."

This courteousness with Bridges was something unusual—he was somewhat surprised at it himself. His customary reply to a question such as he had been asked was: "What do you want with him?" But there was something about the mild-mannered old gentleman before him that appealed to him. For one thing he reminded him of a fine old character he had seen on the screen a few nights before. He was sorry he hadn't been exactly polite—he wished to make amends.

He telephoned to Bottman, chief timekeeper for Steelburg Mills. Bottman rose from his chair at his big desk in the time office, looked over a room filled with half a hundred busy timekeepers, brass-checkmen, calculators, verifiers and stenographers, and shouted: "Anybody got Wellington Gay?" And a pop-eyed young man in a far corner of the room answered at once: "Scale wheeler at the ingot mill. Check Number 6489."

Bottman had a good system. Bottman could in a moment put his finger, as it were, on any one of Steelburg Mills' ten thousand employees.

Bridges turned to the old gentleman. "Yes, we have a man named Wellington Gay. What can I do for you further?"

The old gentleman smiled. "This is indeed good luck," he said. "I was not certain that the man was in Steelburg, but I thought I would ask for him at all of the different establishments, and this is my first inquiry. I wonder if I could see your head man, your general manager or general superintendent."

"You will find him in that room yonder," replied Bridges, pointing to Goodlow's office door. "Go in."

The old man hesitated. "Perhaps I should send in my card. If he is occupied—"

"Oh, no; that will be all right—he will see you now."

The caller walked into the general manager's office. Bridges looking after him smiled as he thought how

different it would have been a short while before, with Teller in there. The door would have been shut; he would have carried the caller's card in and laid it before the general manager; that pompous official would have looked at it, mused over it for several minutes, chewed his cigar savagely, read a letter or two, and then grunted: "Show him in"; or, "Tell him I'll see him in a half hour."

But Goodlow was different. On the first day of his coming he had fastened the door open and said to Bridges: "There's no need of my keeping that door shut if you'll keep your mouth shut—when you happen to overhear something that is said in there, you know. If anybody comes here and asks to see me, shoot him in. You shoot people in and I'll shoot them out. I'm not afraid that I shall be bothered."

Goodlow's caller advanced to the table where Goodlow was seated.

"My name is Spencer," he said, presenting his card. "I am of the firm of Spencer & Banks, Grain Dealers, Buffalo."

"Will you be seated?" Goodlow indicated a chair.

"I am here to try to have an interview with one of your employees, Wellington Gay. I was passing through the city and my interest in the young man is such that I could not go on without attempting to locate him and have a few words with him. In fact, I hope to be able to induce him to go away with me."

"Wellington Gay?" repeated Goodlow. "I never heard of the man. But that is not surprising—we have several thousand men in our employ, and I have been here but a short while. What is he—a foreman of some sort?"

"Oh, I hardly think so; but, of course, I don't know. He was, when I met him and became acquainted with him—but perhaps you would be interested in learning how I came to know him."

And Randolph Spencer began telling the story of his meeting Wally Gay in the wheat country.

Goodlow had not laid down the cost sheet which he had been studying when Spencer entered his room; he continued to hold it, that he might use it as an instrument for shooting out this caller should his business prove to be of no importance. In that case he would become preoccupied, return to the study of the cost sheet, begin to make notations on it with a pencil, buzz for his secretary, and when Bridges would appear he would say: "Tell Mr. Gonsall or Mr. Baum to fetch me last month's Bessemer records, and send a stenographer in here." The caller would take the hint and go. That was Goodlow's way; it was thus he shot out the unwanted. The great majority of them he did, but now and then there was one who wouldn't take the hint. Once a persistent insurance agent ignored three hints. Then Goodlow buzzed again for Bridges. "Send Mike O'Toole in here to clean out this office," he said. The agent slithered out.

But this morning he did not resume his perusal of the cost sheet. Spencer had talked but a few moments when he threw the paper upon his desk, leaned back in his chair and gave his whole attention to the story his caller was telling. Once he reached into a drawer in the desk behind him and drew out a box of cigars, which he passed to his visitor, lighting one himself.

And once he interrupted Spencer to say, "Will you please repeat that? I cannot understand why I have not heard of this young man if he is working here, though, as I have said, I have not been here for any great length of time."

When the story had been told he sat silent for a few moments, then said, "I should have thought some one of the heads of departments would have mentioned him to me, for he must be holding a fairly good position. I don't wonder at your wishing to get hold of him, Mr. Spencer. I hope he doesn't go with you—we need his kind here."

He put his hand beneath the edge of his table top and pressed a buzzer button. Bridges came to the door.

"Find out where Wellington Gay or Wally Gay works."

"He's at the ingot mill, Mr. Goodlow," replied Bridges promptly, and he gave a quiet little chuckle. That ought to make a hit with Goodlow—his having the asked-for information right at the tip of his tongue. But Goodlow spoiled the little triumph.

"Bridges, how do you happen to know that fact?"

"I was locating him for this gentleman a few minutes ago, and Bottman told me he was a scale wheeler."

"A scale wheeler! Telephone to Jaster at the ingot mill, Bridges, and tell him to send the man to my office at once."

Ten minutes later Wally Gay walked into Bridges' office, a trifle nervous, a little scared. Mill workers don't like to be sent for by the Old Man—it too often means trouble. He was dressed in a torn and greasy suit of overalls, his hands were black with grime, and his face streaked with dirt. There was something striking and forceful about Wally Gay's face that the dirt from the mills, with which it was smudged, could not conceal; there was a strength in his brown eyes, and as Bridges looked up from his newspaper his artistic self was startled.

"What a face for the screen!" he murmured.

"Are you Wellington Gay?" he asked. And receiving an affirmative reply he said: "Go in yonder," pointing to the door opening into the general manager's office.

His curiosity was roused. What could Goodlow and the white-haired old gentleman want with this dirty wop? Perhaps he should find out. He quietly crossed his office, took a position close to the open door, where he could hear all that was said in the next room, while apparently busying himself with arranging a shelf of books on the wall. He might be able to get a little tip for a good scenario here. For be it said that Bridges'

ambitions did not lie along the lines of iron and steel—he aspired to be a writer of moving-picture plays—he wanted to write a scenario that would sell.

Wally entered Goodlow's office hesitatingly, twisting his little cloth cap about in his hands. Spencer turned, saw him and rose from his chair.

"Hello, there, young man!" he cried.

Wally looked at him for a moment in silence. Then a flush showed through the smudge on his cheeks.

"Oh—good mornin', Mr. Spencer!" he stammered. "No, I reckon we can't shake hands—mine are too dirty." And he stepped back.

"What's a dirty hand? There's plenty of soap and water in the world! Shake hands! And how are you, Mr. Gay?"

"Pretty well; how are you?" And then he rushed on: "Say, Mr. Spencer, I've got the money to pay you back that there twenty-five dollars you let me have to get to Buffalo; and for the ticket too. I've been wantin' to send it to you all the time, but I didn't know where to send it to. I lost that letter you give me."

Spencer laughed. "And what about the money I owe you?" he said. "I've got over three hundred dollars that belongs to you—the wages due you from John Peterson. I succeeded in collecting it all from Peterson's nephew, after considerable difficulty, and it is now in a Buffalo savings bank. You can have it whenever you want it. How are you getting along here?"

"Gettin' along fine."

"Why didn't you go on to Buffalo after I had started you there?"

"Oh, I got back here to Steelburg and I'd always lived here and I liked it here, so I thought I'd stay here."

"Then I suppose you don't care to go on with me now? That little office next to mine, that I told you about is empty again. I haven't yet found the right man to put in there, unless you'll go. What do you say?"

"No, I like Steelburg; I like the mills."

"What are you doing now?" asked Goodlow.

"Wheelin' scale at the ingot mill."

"How long have you been there?"

"Quite a while—two or three years, I guess."

"You've always lived in Steelburg, you say?"

"Yes, up in Vinegar Gully."

"Who are your folks? Is your father living? What does he do?"

Wally did not reply at once, and just for an instant a glint of anger showed in his brown eyes. Then he discovered something in the faces of the two men before him that reassured him.

"I reckon I haven't got no folks," he said, smiling faintly. "I was a nobody's kid. I come here in a car of pig iron. Joe Gay found me and raised me, and I just sort of growed up in the mills."

Outside the door the eavesdropping Bridges clenched his fists, raised them to the level of his face and tensed his arm muscles. "A plot! A plot for a picture!" he muttered.

"Well, if you don't want to go to Buffalo to take a position with our firm," said Spencer, "I'm sure I wish you success here. Shall I send your money to you?"

"Why, no—I guess not. I don't need it now. You might leave it there in the bank. I'll send for it some day. Much obliged, but I'll stay on here."

"Very well. I was at Wheaton and through the country thereabouts last week, I met a Miss Creeth there—Miss Amy Creeth. You remember her, of course?"

"Sure, I do!"

"She asked me to give you her kindest regards, should I meet you. Young man, if I were you I believe I'd write to Miss Creeth. I'm pretty sure she'd be glad to hear from you. She is going to teach in Wheaton next winter."

"Aha! Appears the woman!" chuckled the listening Bridges.

Again a red flush showed beneath the grime on the cheeks of the young workman, and he stirred uneasily and twisted his little cap more tightly.

"I reckon I'd better be gettin' back to work," he mumbled.

"All right, Gay; that's all," said Goodlow.

Spencer rose and shook hands with him.

"Good-by and good luck. Maybe I'll see you again some day. Take one of my cards, and whenever you wish me to send you the money I'm holding just write to me. I have taken out what you owed me, so you need not worry about that. Write to me sometime and tell me how you are. And take my advice and write to Miss Creeth."

In the adjoining room Bridges went slipping back to his desk, and he was penning the opening lines of a new photoplay as Wally passed through his office.

"I like that young fellow," said Spencer. "I liked him the first time I saw him. There's something in him. I wish I could have him with me; I'd like to watch him develop. He's sadly handicapped, it is true, by his unfortunate bringing up, but I believe he will overcome that."

"I'll keep an eye on him; I'll see that he has given him a chance to get on. I'm mighty glad that I could meet you, Mr. Spencer, and I'm glad, too, that I learned about this man. I am interested already in him."

Goodlow shook hands with Spencer as the latter rose to go, walked with him to the door of his office, and then returned to his desk and sat down and picked up his cost sheet. But it did not get his attention. He sat gazing out of a window, drumming the table before him with his fingers and whistling softly, and he was so occupied when Lafayette Murdock walked into his office.

"Murdock, what do you know about a young man in the mills by the name of Wellington Gay?" he asked quickly.

"Wally Gay? Oh, he's a scrubby little scroot that

works down at the ingot mill. Somebody's bastard that was shipped in here in a car of pig iron——”

He broke off suddenly in his speech. He had seen something jump into Goodlow's eyes; he had sensed some subtle change in the attitude of the man before him that startled him, scared him. He coughed, started to speak again, but Goodlow's words came first:

“Murdock, that's pretty mean talk! It's sorry, contemptible talk! A scurvier utterance I never heard from a man of your supposed intelligence!” There was a wire edge to Goodlow's voice and Murdock winced as it cut him. “Hereafter when I wish to inquire about an employee of this plant I shall not ask you! What do you wish to see me about?”

Murdock finished his business in a very few minutes and hurriedly left the office. He had not been getting along well with Goodlow; he was conscious that from the first he had not made a favorable impression with him, and now he had stirred his ire deeply.

It was in the dining room where the heads of departments met each day for lunch, a few days later, when Goodlow's wire-edge voice cut into Murdock again and caused him to wince. The meal was over, cigars had been lighted, and the daily business meeting was in session. But Goodlow did not enter upon the regular routine.

“Gentlemen,” he began, “when I came to Steelburg to take charge of this plant I informed you that I was strictly opposed to what we speak of here as favoritism. I told you that I wanted every man working in Steelburg Mills to have a square deal, and be given opportunity to advance to better position and better pay. I told you I didn't give a two-penny damn how religious you were at your work in the plant, but that you were to leave your churches outside; how much you were inclined to indulge in professions of brotherly love, but that there were to be no lodge meetings inside the gates; how much you loved your relations—your cousins, your brothers—

in-law, your step nephews—but that you were not too over about them in these mills. You may have thought at that time that I was simply talking for diversion making conversation. Some of you evidently did, have discovered that in certain departments concerned along the lines of which I have been speaking are as rotten as they could possibly be. Tell me how the men in Steelburg Mills are to get a square deal, how they hope to get ahead, what there is for them to look forward to if you heads of departments and your foremen under you are to determine a man's fitness and qualifications for something better by the church he belongs to by the lodge button he wears in the lapel of his coat or by the nearness of his kinship with you. I want to understand me this time! There's going to be sudden change in these conditions and practices, and your foremen are going to make that change either you will or I will!

"There has been brought to my attention the case of a young man who has worked here for years, who has given practically his whole life to this company who has been a steady, faithful, willing workman. I have learned too, that this man possesses mental qualifications that would probably have enabled him to have gone ahead had he been given a chance. Some of you undoubtedly knew of this fact. But where is he to go? He can't go to the Wheeling scale! He didn't belong to any church, any lodge, and he had no family whatsoever—he was a nobody, a nobody without a pull. Perhaps that's why he didn't get on, why he was never given a chance. But I may be wrong; there may have been good reasons for his failing to advance—he may have been wholly incompetent. Maybe some of you know.

"Ackerman, I have learned that you worked for Gay for several years. Why did he never get any favors with you? Why did you hold him down as a foreman about?"

Ackerman started and began to squirm uneasily

chair. "Why, I—he never kicked—he never asked—I had no place—" he began.

"Quite so!" snapped Goodlow. "Your ranks were so choked with your cousins and uncles and aunts that there was no place for an outsider! Do you hold your family reunions in these mills, Ackerman? If you have been you want to look about for another picnic grounds this year!"

"Jaster, you've kept Wally Gay in that scale hole at the ingot mill for two or three years. Why?"

Jaster dropped his eyes and stared at a pickle on his plate. "Well, Mr. Teller sent him down there and said I was to put him in the scale hole, and I—why, I never thought he—"

"Exactly! You, Jaster, came from County Clare—or was it bonny Scotland?—or was it lovely Wales? County Clare men—or bonny Scotlanders—or lovely Welsh—they're the men you have been boasting along; not the nobodies from Vinegar Gully!"

"Calla, what do you know about Wally Gay? Didn't you get a hint once that he might make a good man in your department?"

Mr. Cecil Calla flicked a fleck of dust from a flawless cuff. "Er—I believe a shipping clerk of mine told me once that this man knew something about figures, but he was, I understood at the time, rather uneducated and somewhat crude and coarse—"

"Say that again, Calla!" broke in Goodlow. "That's interesting! Crude and coarse! Calla, you ought to get down on your knees every night and thank God there are crude and coarse men! It's a fine lot of silk shirts you'd be wearing if there were no crude and coarse men! If my first boss had been a man like you I might yet be a pig wheeler in a Pittsburgh furnace! Crude and coarse! Rats!"

Mr. Calla passed an immaculate handkerchief over a pink face.

"Manning, could you find a place in the Open Hearth

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for young Gay?" Goodlow asked, addressing a man seated at the farther end of the table.

"Oh, yes; I've always got a place for a good man."

"Then you may tell Gay to report to Manning at the Open Hearth, Jaster. And, Manning, I want you to forget that I spoke to you for him. Don't consider him a protégé of mine, for he isn't. Give him a chance, that's all I'm asking. If he makes good you'll know what to do; if he fails to qualify let him go. I don't want any one of you to handicap yourself with some inefficient man merely because you think I am interested in him. That is all for to-day."

There was a scraping of chair legs on the floor as chairs were pushed back.

"Did you say something, Murdock?" Goodlow snapped. He was leaning forward, his fingers resting on the table, looking straight at the assistant manager, who had sat by the side of Jaster at the farther end of the table.

"No, I said nothing," replied Murdock, and fourteen flashing gold teeth suddenly disappeared from view.

But he had said something. He had muttered to Jaster: "That's the tommiest tommyrot I ever heard! He's an old woman! You keep right on as you've been doing, Jaster—I'll take care of things!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CHANCE

IT might have been a week or two weeks or three weeks after the long-remembered meeting in the superintendents' lunch room—somebody has tampered with the chronology of the history at this point—when a shipping clerk halted Aquilla Moseley, a steel inspector, as the latter walked through the yards to his office.

"What d'ye know about that, Quill?" he demanded. "Here I've forgotten my plug and you don't chew! Got a stogy in your pocket that I could bite the end off of? Well, Quill, old rooster, it looks like house-cleaning time in the mills, eh? Three of Ackerman's kinsfolk, four of Jaster's and two of Hannigan's have gone out into the cold, cold world, and it is rumored about that a lot more of our bench-warming Willies are in for a bump. What d'ye know about it? Didn't I tell you that Goodlow would make a hit? Hit? Call it a smash! I heard he landed on Lafe Murdock the other day so hard it almost jarred Lafe's fourteen gold teeth loose. Goodlow's secretary told somebody and somebody told Skinny Thudd and Skinny wigwagged the glad news to me. That's good.

"And Wally Gay's gone over to the Open Hearth to learn to make steel. What d'ye know about that, Quill? There's the right place for a fellow to start in at to get to be a steel man. The Bessemer process will be a dead one in a few years, and then the Open Hearth man will be the big cheese in the steel business. And say, Quill, what d'ye think? Calla Lily told me the other day *that I am to come over to the main office the first of*

the month and go on the books! What d'ye know about it? Honestly, I thought I was stuck on this job for the rest of my days. But I'll bet Goodlow had a whole lot to do with it—I wouldn't give Calla Lily credit for anything—not for three cents if I saw him giving four with my own eyes. Well, I've got to keep moving, Quill. I'm breaking in a new man to take my place, and say, Quill, he's a proper dub. Yesterday Lum Moochener told him to go down to the north yard and card out a car of gumgollies, and gave him a car number on a piece of paper, and I'm a sucker, Quill, if he didn't go looking for it! Gone an hour or two and then came back and asked Lum what gumgollies were. And when Lum told him they were mildewed pretzels he said 'Dear me!'—and nearly fainted with humiliation. What d'ye know about that, Quill?"

In the Open Hearth Wally Gay was sledgering and carrying and wheeling and shoveling, breaking test pieces of steel and running with them to the laboratory; bringing in to the furnaces back-breaking loads of manganese and spiegeleisen and the various refractories used; spelling the hands, helping them to make bottom, taking hold and tugging with them on a splasher, riding the tapping bar, gasping and cringing before the blistering heat that poured through the hoisted doors of the furnaces; heaving into the seething white lakes within great boulders of red hematite and heavy pigs of iron, and then stooping at a peephole to watch them bobbing about in the bubbling bath as bits of cork bob about on agitated water.

Behind the furnaces, too, he worked, sweltering over a tapping hole, digging and gouging in the fused magnesite with which it was plugged until it was broken through, then stepping back to gaze with fascinated eyes at the white torrent bursting through the uncovered aperture, rushing down the long runner and cascading into the set ladle in the pit below with the roar of a hundred waterfalls.

In the pit he labored, fastening the chain hooks to the slag bowls, dumping the ladles, cleaning the molds, setting the overflow pans, and when the tap was made watching Big Mary, the huge electric crane, come slipping out of the overhead gloom, rumbling along the runway, and dropping down her long, slotted and deformed black hands, to seize the brimming bowl of molten steel—seventy tons of it—and go slipping back into the gloom with murmuring motors.

"Isn't it great? Isn't it great?" he would say to himself. And he would chuckle over the good fortune that had come to him when he was shifted here, and he wondered why they had changed him—why they had taken him out of the scale hole and sent him to the Open Hearth. And he would laugh as he recalled the cries of dismay of Nicker and Dicker when he told the old men he was going to leave them; how they raged and swore; how they put on their coats, took their pails, and stamped out of the mill and through the yard, arm in arm, stopping at the Morgue in Vinegar Gully to drown their anger in many a nip-and-a-beer.

"How is that Wally Gay making out, Ed?" Manning asked one of his foremen one day.

The foreman laughed. "I can't figure out whether Wally's case is one of nuts or of overambitious youth. I never saw a hand more willing to do his part and the other fellow's part too, but that kind of a man——"

"Has he been second-helping yet?"

"Oh, he's done everything there is to be done here; lending a hand, you know; but I haven't had him on a furnace yet."

"You might try him out. Put him on with Red Face; I believe Red Face could get along with him."

The next day Wally went to work with Red Face, a big Pole, a very giant of a man. He was ill-tempered, excitable, quick in quarrel, and in his moments of anger dangerous. Because of his mean and ugly disposition, his quarrelsomeness and his constant petulance it was

difficult to find a man who would work with him for any length of time. Sometimes he would show pronounced signs of insanity, and then the workmen on the floor could not be induced to go near him. Had he not been one of the best furnace men in the plant he would have been discharged long before. But now, to the surprise of all, he showed a decided liking for his new helper, and was as quiet and easy-going with him as he was harsh and violent toward others.

Again Wally rejoiced over the good luck that had come to him—he was now on the way to learning the mysteries of steel making, under the tutelage of one of the best of furnace men. And with the same zest and enthusiasm that had always been characteristic of him he entered upon his new job.

It was but a short while before he was watching the roof of the furnace for Red Face, to see that the nipping tongues of flame pouring in through the furnace ports did not touch the brick arches and start "icicles." He was soon learning to read the carbon in the ends of the broken test pieces of steel, with Red Face carefully pointing out to him the different appearances in the grain of the steel, calling his attention to certain "worm holes" and explaining their significance, and making clear to him the effects of slow cooling and rapid cooling. He was observing the action of the various materials he was throwing into the furnace from time to time, as they went into the bath, and asking innumerable questions. He learned to put a test bar into the bath to try the temperature of the melting steel; how to splash out a puddle hole in the furnace's bottom and how to patch it; how to break down a honeycombed bank and how to rebuild it; how to make up a tapping hole and to mud up a runner; how to reverse and regulate the gas.

The big Pole would chuckle as he watched his helper laboring in his enthusiasm, relieving him of so much of his own work, and something like affection would now and then show in the dull fishy eyes of the giant.

"You watch 'em, Wally! You watch 'em!" he would say. "Some day you get a furnace, you bet! I show you—I show you ever't'ing!"

It was hard labor, that second-helping, exhausting, killing labor, and often after a long twelve-hour stretch, when the work had been unusually severe, he would stumble into his miserable little shack in Vinegar Gully, where he continued to live alone, too tired to prepare himself a meal, too worn out to sleep, and he would throw himself upon his hard cot, to lie there through the long night, gazing at the black ceiling, until the whistle blew again, calling him back to his furnace.

So the winter wore through and the work pulled him down until he was thin and lean. And his face was burned to a fiery red by the fierce heat of the furnace, to which he was always exposed, and the skin on his nose peeled and rolled up into little rolls, like tiny bits of tissue paper; and there were blisters on his legs beneath the thin overalls he wore; and on his breast, where his shirt fell open as he worked, the searing heat had branded a great red wedge.

One day Red Face stopped Manning on the floor and spoke to him. "Boss, I guess dot Wally make one fine furnace man now. Dot Wally is one damn goot feller, boss."

Manning smiled. "All right, Red Face, I'll see about it," he said.

A little while afterward the Pole came to Wally. "Dot Meester Mannin' is ver' fine man, but dot odder feller, dot Lafe boss—poosh! You watch 'em, Wally—some day I get dot feller! She's no goot, dot Lafe boss! You watch 'em!"

The speech disturbed Wally, for he had been noticing for several days that the man was acting queerly. He had had fits of wild, unreasonable anger, and had turned on the other workmen when they approached him and threatened them until they fled from him. Once a crane-man had roused him to a state of frenzy by dropping

a box of limestone where he did not want it dumped. Screaming and cursing he had seized a sledge, swung it about his head, and hurled it aloft with all his mighty strength at the craneman in his cab. It fell far short of its mark and the craneman had jeered and laughed, exciting and infuriating him still further.

"Next time, Wally, dot feller do dot I go up!" he roared. "I go up, I pitch dot craneman out an' I run dot crane, me! I run dot crane goot!" Some years before he had worked as a craneman, and it was said about the mills that there had never been a more efficient one.

Wally sought his foreman and told him he thought the man was going insane, relating to him what had occurred, what Red Face had threatened to do with the craneman, and speaking about his threat against Murdock. The foreman laughed.

"Oh, he'll be all right in a few days. He has those spells now and then. I've known him for years and he has always been as he is. Let him have his own way, don't stir him up, and he won't cause any trouble."

It was a week later, and Murdock came walking down the floor one morning, his gold teeth flashing, his little eyes darting to the right and to the left, intent on discovering something about which he could complain. The Pole began to mutter as soon as he caught sight of the assistant manager.

"But what's the matter with him, Red Face?" Wally demanded. "What did he ever do to you?"

"She? Dot feller, she come an' she say: 'Hey, you beeg Polack, how much for mooney for presents for dot beeg boss? Two dollar, hey?' An' I say: 'Sure t'ing, Meester Murdock!' I no can lose my job. I work lak hell for dot two dollar an' she come an' takes 'em for presents for dot beeg boss! You watch 'em, Wally—I get dot feller!"

Wally left the man and walked off. He was afraid of him now—he had never seen him in a state so bad as this. He thought he should warn Murdock but he hesitated,

for he knew it would result in the discharging of Red Face. And the foreman might be right—perhaps he would recover from his derangement in a day or two. But the longer he gave thought to the matter the more he felt he should speak to either Murdock or Manning. He went on toward Manning's office, into which he had seen Murdock go. He would tell him, and then suggest that Red Face be given a chance—that he be sent home for a few days. Just outside the office door, where he paused for a moment, he overheard Manning's voice, and then Murdock's.

"I'm going to give Wally Gay a furnace."

"What? That Vinegar Gully mongrel? Say, Manning, why don't you pick out a decent man for a good job like that? Somebody's cast-off, somebody's—"

An electric crane rolled by overhead, the noise it made drowning out all other sounds thereabout. It passed on and Wally started to move away when he heard Manning say: "I'm not giving the job to your nephew because he's not capable of taking care of it. That's exactly why!"

Again Murdock's loud voice broke out, and the few ugly words Wally caught as he hurried off told him he was still Murdock's subject. He had heard too much. He walked rapidly down the floor, the hot blood of uncontrollable rage rushing through his veins, tugging at his pulses, pounding at his temples, flooding the chambers of his heart till every nerve of his body ached with awful anger. He stopped. He had heard too much. He had heard himself spoken of in words he loathed, in scurrilous, contemptible terms, in terms he had heard no other man use, which he would permit no man to use!

He turned and went back toward Manning's office. He would go in, confront Murdock, make him retract, make him apologize. Failing in that he would fight him then and there!

On the threshold he checked himself. That wouldn't do, in Manning's private office—he must consider Man-

ning. He would wait here, outside the door, and when the man came out he would smash him—a blow, just one, on that protruding jaw, and he would go down! He would leap upon him, stamp upon his ugly face, kick in his flashing gold teeth, make him howl like a beaten dog!

With fists clenched, with muscles taut and corded till they were hard as rods of steel, he stood and waited, ready for that forward lunge. And as the fighter in the ring feels for the foot grip on the resined canvas so he felt for a foot holding on the smooth iron plates on which he stood. His shoes slipped over it, and he stepped quickly to a box of sand that stood by a crane track close by and scooped up a double handful, which he sprinkled over the polished floor. And again he took position and waited.

Behind him he heard a yell, a cry of rage, a maniacal scream. He turned and looked and saw a craneman in a small, speedy electric crane, dumping a box of ore at the side of the big Pole's furnace. He saw the man at the furnace waving his arms and shaking his huge fists, and he heard him yelling and cursing. Then he caught the sound of the jeering laughter of the craneman as he moved his crane away.

Suddenly the maddened furnace man started to run along the floor in the direction taken by the crane overhead. He came to a great steel column, one of the building's supports, to which was fastened an iron ladder. Without pausing or slackening his speed he sprang upon the ladder and ran nimbly up it, hand flying over hand, foot over foot, hands and feet taking the rungs with unerring accuracy. At the ladder's top he climbed to the flat spread of a girder, along which he sped, fifty feet above the glowing furnaces, still following the flying crane.

A hundred pairs of eyes were turned toward the running man. They saw the craneman leaning from his cab and gesturing to his pursuer, and they could see

he was laughing. Then they saw the laughter go from his lips and a look of fear succeed it. Near a safety exit from which a stairs led to the outside of the building he brought his crane to a jarring stop, clambered from the cab, and disappeared through the exit. The runner came to the crane, climbed upon one of its girders, rushed across its sixty-foot span and dropped into the cab.

Then he began to race the crane up and down the runway, laughing and chattering in maniacal glee. A foreman had hurried to a telephone to order the electric current shut off, but a storm the previous night had put the plant's telephone system out of commission. A man was started running to the power house, but that building was nearly half a mile distant. Up and down the runway, back and forth went the crane, with its hoist running in and out and with the chains rising and falling, as the mad operator played with the controllers. The sudden startings and stoppings of the machine's motors had set the chains to flying wildly, rattling and clashing against themselves and against the slag pans and ladles and molds in the pit below. To one of the hoist chains a smaller chain had been attached, for moving light loads, a chain of small links, flexible and sinuous. Like the steel cracker of some Gargantua's whip it curved and twisted and snapped at the end of the flying hoist chains.

Murdock coming out of Manning's office and hearing the shouting and the yelling of the workmen, and seeing them staring upward, walked rapidly across the floor, passed between two furnaces, and came out on the tapping platform behind. He arrived there just at the moment the crane passed over that spot, just as the flying chains, describing a long arc, came sweeping past.

With uncanny and devilish accuracy, as though guided by invisible hands, the smaller chain shot out, curved and encircled his body at the waist, and the hook fell over the links, making the loop complete. Jerked from his feet at the same instant the man went swinging out over

the pit. An awful cry of terror came from his lips, a louder scream from the maniac in the crane cab.

Then began an exhibition of horror so terrible, so appalling, so sickening that men groaned and hid their faces from the sight, ran from the building and fled away through the yards, trembling, looking back with fearful eyes, aghast at what they had beheld.

Up and down the runway raced the crane, guided by the hand of the madman. In and out ran the hoist with the cable drums spinning, now taking up the cable to which the chains were fastened, now letting it run out. And in long arcs swept the shrieking man with the loop of steel chain about his body, now over and very close to a red pool of molten slag, now above a great-mouthed ladle still aglow from the hot steel it had contained, now high in the air, now all but dragging on the slaggy ground of the pit. And above the noise of the grinding wheels of the crane and the humming of the laboring motors, above the cries of those who remained to watch the fearful sight rang out the frenzied cries of the suspended man and the screaming laughter of the madman.

Wally was standing at the opposite side of the furnace when the chain had looped itself about Murdock's body. Horror-stricken by what he was witnessing he stood for a moment as though paralyzed. Then he acted quickly. Running to the edge of the platform he let himself over it and dropped to the ground below. Rushing across the pit he came to a column to which was fixed a ladder, up which he climbed with all his speed, and reached a girder, the runway for four wheels of the crane. He was now on the same side of the building as the crane cab.

He knew his way up there, knew every foot of the girders and beams, knew where the danger spots were and where the safety platforms and ladders, for many an hour had he spent up there in the long night shifts when, with his own work caught up, he would leave the floor and go above to gaze down on the magnificent sight below—the white smoking rivers pouring out of the

furnaces and into the black-mouthed ladles; the great pools and huge bowls of red and yellowish slag with the little blobs of purple and green flames dancing over its crackly scum; the long unbroken line of glowing molds filled with the molten steel, with the sputtering sparks of yellow fluttering about their contracted tops like swarms of golden bees seeking somewhere to alight; the leaping tongues of flame licking the port joints and the furnace doors.

But nothing of all this did he behold now, for his eyes were on the crane ahead of him, and his brain was busy with the plan he had thought out for deceiving the maniac and saving the man dangling at the end of the flying chain. The crane was coming back, it was approaching him—now it was very near.

"Hi! Red Face! Red Face!" he shouted. "Take me in! Take me in with you!" He began to wave his cap and to leap up and down on the safety platform to which he had climbed. "Take me in! Let me go, too, Red Face!"

The madman saw him and heard him, and he ran the crane nearer. "Sure! Climb in, Wally!" he yelled. "Hurry up; hurry up!"

Wally climbed to a crane girder, climbed down a short ladder fixed to the side of the cab and slipped in.

"I got 'em, Wally; I got 'em!" gloated the crazed giant. "Watch 'em, Wally! I fix dot feller now!"

"Show me, Red Face, show me how to run the crane!" begged Wally. "You showed me how to make steel, now show me how to run the crane!"

"Sure t'ing, Wally! I show you. Rack 'em out—like dot; rack 'em in—like dot; hoist—so; lever—so. You try."

With trembling hands he took hold of the controller handles and began to turn them, Red Face watching him as though he suspected him, and keeping his own great hands near. If they would only shut off the power!

"Ha, ha, ha! I got 'em, eh, Wally? Dot feller, he

say: 'How much for presents for beeg boss? Two dollar, hey?" The voice of the madman rose to a scream. He leaned far out of the cab and gazed down at the struggling man on the chain. "Hi, you!" he yelled, "how much for chance to get loose? Two dollar, hey?"

Would they never shut off the power? Wally lowered the chains until the trapped man was very close to the ground, but the big man at his side was watching him, and he reached over and threw back the handle.

"Keep 'em up; keep 'em up!" he shouted.

Three hundred feet beyond them a furnace that had been left to itself while its crew watched the tragic scene before them, or fled away in horror, suddenly tapped itself, and its seething flood came tumbling out and pouring into the ladle that had been set some time before. The maniac's laughter was redoubled as he saw what was happening.

"We dip her! We dip dot feller! Maybe we spoil dot heat, eh, Wally? Maybe we give dot heat too much carbon, but we dip her!" He shoved Wally to one side and seized the controller handles.

"Let me, Red Face; let me!" begged Wally, tugging at the handles.

But the madman chuckled.

"No, no, I do dot, Wally—I do dot goot!" The crane leaped forward, running toward the tapping furnace. And again the giant leaned from the cab to shout down: "How much you give for chance? Two dollar, hey?"

Before he could straighten up Wally sprang upon him and sank his fingers into his throat, forcing every atom of his strength into the grip of his hands, hoping and praying he could choke him and prevent him from moving the crane farther. The maniac grunted and began to push back, twisting and struggling. As he did so he unintentionally checked the moving crane, but it continued to creep toward the filling ladle. The man dangling at the chain's end was now on a level with the stream of

molten metal—he would strike it where it leaped from the runners' mouth into the ladle.

The madman was gasping for breath under the pressure of the two hands about his throat, but he continued to push steadily back, with the great muscles of his back and arms standing out, through the thin shirt he was wearing, in lumps and cords, and with horror Wally realized that in another minute or two he would be crushed against the cab's side. The splash of the steel came to his ears, and the odor of the yellow, ocherous smoke floating from the hot metal smote his nostrils. Would they never shut off the power? The giant had now worked his elbow up until its point was pressing against his face; his head was being forced back; black spots began to dance before his eyes—the light was failing—it was gone.

With a noise in his throat not unlike the snarl of some angry and hunger-maddened beast of prey the madman straightened up and reached for the controller handle. At the same moment a black and dirty hand came in at the cab window, holding in its grasp a heavy iron wrench.

The hand rose, wavered just an instant, and the iron tool crashed down upon the head of the madman. An electrician slipped into the cab, stumbled over the two crumpled forms on the floor and seized the controller handles.

CHAPTER VIII

A MEETING AND A PARTING

WHEN Wally returned to work a few days later he was given a furnace, the same furnace where he had been working under Red Face. And that same day Goodlow came through the Open Hearth, went straight to him and shook him by the hand.

"Gay, that was a magnificently courageous thing you did up there the other day," he said.

A flush showed through the dirt and dust that covered the new furnace man's face. "Aw, that wasn't nothin'," he mumbled. And he dropped his blue glasses over his eyes and went to peer in at a peephole in one of the furnace doors.

A steel melter! A furnace man! A first helper! He could hardly believe it—it was too good to be true. Now he would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night, in his shack in Vinegar Gully, to stare up at the black ceiling and muse over his great step forward. Why, he was somebody now! He was a steel maker—he was doing big work. Who could sneer at him now, call him a wop, a roustabout, an Indian? And he was drawing big money too! He might live in better surroundings now, and wear better clothes. Why not? Why not leave Vinegar Gully? He had begun to have a dislike for the place—since he had returned to Steelburg it had never seemed the same—and he was not frequenting The Morgue and The Bucket of Blood as he once did. Sometimes he would half resolve to buy some books and attempt study, try to acquire that something that he knew he did not possess, that he had failed to secure to him-

self, that mysterious something that he had found in Peterson, in Spencer, in Amy Creeth, that made them different from him, superior to him.

Amy Creeth! It was very pleasant to think of Amy Creeth. He would picture her as he saw her the last time—running along the station platform, waving her handkerchief at him. Then, with humiliation in his soul, he would recall how he had been unable to write a letter for Peterson, but must ask Amy Creeth to compose it, after which he would copy it in his perfect manner of writing. Ignorant—he was ignorant! Spencer had told him that day in Goodlow's office that Amy Creeth would like to hear from him, and advised him to write to her. He wished he could—he wanted to tell her how well he was getting on in the world, but a letter—he couldn't write a letter! He couldn't spell correctly, he couldn't form sentences as they should be formed, he had refused to study his English lessons when he was going to school. What did he know about writing letters?

Sometimes as he shoveled and sledged and sweat before the hot furnace these thoughts would recur to him, but they did not dwell long in his mind there in front of the furnace, for his work demanded his whole attention; and because he gave it that attention which it demanded, because he found joy in his job, because he believed in his soul that now had he found his life's work, he became a good steel maker.

"My steel!" he would murmur as he gazed at the white cascade at the runner's mouth, taking its leap into the seventy-ton ladle. "My steel!" he would whisper as he watched the steel pourer filling the tall red molds, the mold capper capping them, and the narrow-gauge locomotives dragging them away. "My steel!" he would chuckle as he stood in the billet mill, whither he would sometimes run for a few minutes, and see the ingots coming out of the soaking pits, yellowish-white and dripping, see them smashing through the rolls, follow the bars through the finishing mills, hear the sheared billets hiss-

ing and popping in the cooling tank, watch them tumbling into the cars. And he would go through the inspection yard on his way back to his furnace and stop there to climb into the cars that held Number Four's steel, and he would run his hands over the smooth surfaces of the blue billets, and look critically at their ends for flaws, and gloat over them. And when he would catch sight of a switch engine moving out of the inspection yard with a drag of billet-laden cars he would laugh and tell himself "There goes my steel!" envisioning it scattered among a thousand shops and forges, fashioned into a thousand different shapes, handled and utilized by a thousand people—his steel, the steel he had made!

Bridges, piloting a famous authoress through the mills one night—she was there seeking material for her new book—came into the Open Hearth with his charge. He was in bad humor. Why did these prying people bother him so continuously? The Old Man had asked him to act as guide to the authoress; it had to be done. And there was a new film on at the Saturn Theater that night! The authoress found his answers to her questions of little assistance to her in her search for material; she was doubtful whether her visit to the mills would profit her greatly.

As they came upon the floor and stood before the long row of furnaces the gray-haired lady exclaimed: "Oh, what a magnificent spectacle!"

Bridges glanced about him. "Splendid picture for the screen," he observed.

The woman looked at him curiously, then laughed.

The great open building was flooded with that strange, mysterious light that comes from a mingling of the lights from high-powered lamps, molten steel, glowing slag and flaming gas. A thin fog of smoke and dust drifting over and among the furnaces softened the glare of the light and streaked it with shifting shades and shadows, and through it moved the silhouetted forms of men at work—

going back and forth and to and fro, stooping and rising, lifting, carrying, sledging, wheeling, shoveling. Across the floor in front of them the door of a furnace slipped slowly upward, and they shielded their eyes from the fierce white light that poured upon them, and shrank away from the waves of heat that suddenly struck against them. Through the interstices of their fingers they saw a man step in front of the opened door, very close to it. They saw him stand there, looking into the furnace, with his arms crossed before his face. And his garments smoked. Then he turned away, facing them, and the door dropped down into place.

"Why, it's the dirty little wop!" muttered Bridges to himself. "That cast-off—'nobody's kid,' he called himself. I began a scenario, playing him up for chief character, but failed to make it go. I must hunt that up; there's good stuff there, I believe."

The woman at his side asked him a question. His answer was incoherent and she walked away from him, went along the floor and stopped before the bench on which Wally Gay was now seated.

When she came back Bridges was sleeping soundly, sitting on a workman's bench, his head propped against a locker.

"Wake up," she said, touching his arm. "It is time we were gone; we have been here three hours."

He leaped to his feet and began to mumble apologies, but she stopped him. He saw that her eyes were lustrosely bright, and there was an animation about her face he had not before noticed.

"Just what I was hoping for!" she exclaimed. "Oh, what an experience—and I nearly missed it! Now I can finish just as I had dreamed of doing—no, much better! Those wonderful eyes! That queer little smile!" She was speaking not to Bridges but to herself.

In her hotel room—it was after midnight when Bridges bade her good night in the hotel's lobby—she sat down to

write, and when daylight came she was still writing. And more than once she had paused to whisper: "This is my chance, my great opportunity! I know it!"

The next day Wally burned a huge pile of odds and ends in the street in front of his ramshackle cottage in Vinegar Gully, hung a For Sale sign in a window, locked the doors, said good-by to the Gully, and moved his few personal belongings to the Grand House, a poor second-rate hotel, but the best there was in Steelburg. He considered it a continuance of the good luck that had been running with him so long when he was given a room adjoining that of Major Fronk, whom he had known, but never intimately, all his life, whom he had always held in a kind of awe—venerable Major Fronk, whose life pursuits were apparently no more than three: Playing old tunes on his old violin, reading bound volumes of old magazines and breathing anathema against the swart-faced sons of Europe who had made of Steelburg the ugly, hideous hole of a place it was.

"Ah, Wally, but I'm doosed glad to see you coming up here to live!" was the major's greeting as he met Wally coming out of his room that first evening of his residence at the Grand House. "It's a sad old dump of a place I know but it's the best there is and the best is what you always want to go after Wally. It was time long ago for you to get out of the Gully. You're making decent money now—you see I've been keeping tab on you—and you ought to live decently. A man should be just as decent as his income. What you want to do now, Wally, is to tog yourself out in a modest way and slick up a little bit, and you'll feel yourself somebody, which you are if you'll only think it. Thinking one's self somebody helps to make somebodies out of more people than any other thing. You've got to believe in yourself. What do you say we saunter down to Sam Sternberger's and take a look at some of his latest styles in clothes?"

Wally soon found he preferred the atmosphere of the Grand House to that of Vinegar Gully. He found he

A MEETING AND A PARTING III

enjoyed a mild drink in the Grand House bar with the major more than he did an iron cocktail in The Morgue or in The Bucket of Blood with some of the boys. The major's old violin made sweeter music than did the piano at The Bucket of Blood, played by Lum Moochener.

There was something about the music that flowed from the major's violin that puzzled him. He could not understand why he should be so strangely stirred by it. The singing of Bulger the Bat at The Morgue had never stirred him, nor had Lum Moochener's piano. But when the major played There is a Green Hill Far Away a lump floated up into his throat and choked him; and when the old man began on another favorite of his, which he had told Wally was The Serenade, he thought of Amy Creeth and John Peterson and the broad prairies where the wheat rustled. And he felt very lonely then.

Amy Creeth! He was thinking of her often now, for the major liked to play The Serenade, and not infrequently he would ask the old man to play it. And then one evening in the major's room, after he had sat silent for several minutes, picking at the calloused spots in the palms of his hands, he looked up and started to speak, stammered, and was again silent. But there was a friendly smile on the major's face that reassured him, and soon he was telling his old companion about Amy Creeth.

The major's eyes sparkled as he listened, and when Wally had finished his tale he smacked his hands together, got up and paced the floor.

"Wally, you write a letter to that girl—write it at once!" he cried decisively. "I'll look over it when you have it ready and lick it into shape for you if it isn't just as it should be. You write that letter."

There was so much of a command in the major's speech that Wally felt he must obey, and he agreed to write the letter. The next day he made a trip into the big city, where he purchased a letter writer's guide. A couple of days later he handed the major a letter to read.

The major put on his spectacles. "Say, did you have this engraved?" he inquired as he ran his eye over the sheet. "Wally, you certainly can sling a pen. Ahem! '*Dear Madam*'. . . What the Sam Hill! I thought you said that you two were sort of chummylike! Well, by Godfrey! Ahem! '*Dear Madam*': Having had for some time a feeling of great admiration——"

"By all the gods of Greece if he hasn't begun a letter, his first letter, to a girl, his only girl, with a participle!" shouted the irate major. With a snort of disgust he tore the letter across, put the two pieces together and ripped them across again, crumpled the whole in his hand and hurled it to the other side of the room.

"Wally, my son, when you write a letter to a girl don't dawdle with any prefatory claptrap. Never mind about fine phrases; don't bother about any rhetorical tommyrot. Get right into your letter—get yourself into it, get the girl into it. Listen now and give ear, you precious young simp! '*Dear Miss Creeth*.' Do you get that? '*Dear Miss Creeth*: I heard the other day that you are now living in Wheaton. I just wish I could be in Wheaton to-night—I'd hunt you up and say howdy if I got arrested for it. I'd hunt you up and ask you if you remembered the time you tried to get me to go to your Sunday school, the time you and I wrote letters together for John Peterson, and that time we drove across the broad prairies together——'"

"But we didn't drive across the broad prairies together," interupted Wally.

"Well, what if you didn't? Say so, anyway. She's probably forgotten, and when she reads it in your letter it will refresh her memory. I was just giving you a sample start-off. Now get busy. But first throw that letter writer's guide out of the window. I know you've got one hidden some place about you."

"All right, major," laughed Wally. "I'll have it ready to-morrow, maybe."

But he didn't have it ready, for the next day a splash of steel burnt his hand and he could not hold a pen. He was rather glad to have an excuse—the major had made the task seem an almost impossible one for him. "Dear Miss Creeth?" He could never bring himself to write that to her—he didn't know her well enough. What would she think of him?

It was the slight burn he had received on his hand that was the cause of his name being brought up in the general manager's office the following day, for Goodlow noticed on his desk among the papers an accident report.

"What's this—has young Gay been injured?" he asked Manning, who had come into his office on business concerning his department.

"Oh, no, a trifling burn—it doesn't amount to anything. By the way, Ed Lister told me yesterday that he is going to leave the mills the first of the year. That is a good way off—nearly six months—but I have already decided that I'll put Wally Gay into Ed's position as assistant foreman. What do you think about it?"

"I approve. But of course, Manning, you are to decide that yourself."

"He has made good, more than good. I consider him one of the best furnace men I have. He is on special steels all the while now."

"I have understood that he is startlingly clever at figures."

"Yes, I have discovered that. He figures out all the charges for his own furnace and I have found out that the foremen frequently consult him when they are puzzled over proportions. Several times he has caught errors in my clerk's calculation, thereby saving himself a lot of extra work. Oh, he'll do—he'll get there."

Outside the door in the next room the listening Bridges struck at the air with a clenched fist. "It's the dirty little wop again! If I could only bring in the woman as she should be brought in! But I'll get it yet—I'll make a go

of this one!" He returned to his desk and lifted some production sheets from a number of pages of manuscript which he began reading.

He was busy over this same manuscript a day or two later when Goodlow approached his desk. He had barely time to thrust his papers into a drawer when his employer spoke to him.

"Bridges, you're elected," he said, smiling. "You have some delightful work ahead of you. I imagine you'll jump for joy when I tell you what it is. You've been reading in the papers, of course, about the coming annual convention of the Teachers' League of America, which meets in the big burg next week. The city is going to be overrun with school-teachers from all over the country. The league's secretary has been to see me about their visiting this plant, and from what he said I suppose ninety per cent of them will wish to go through the mills."

"Heaven bless the other ten per cent!" interjected Bridges.

"I knew you'd be glad, Bridges. I don't like to do it, but I've decided to open the gates to them for two days. You and twenty-five or thirty other good-looking young men will act as guides, guards and entertainers to the bunch. I want you to take charge of things. See Calla to-day. He will furnish most of your men. We'll have them here on Thursday and Friday. Fix it up—I haven't time to bother about it."

They came, as Goodlow had said they would—came by the hundreds to look upon the wonders of the steel mills. Bridges had been through one awful day, and the second day was at hand. He had piloted his tenth party of twenty teachers each through the yards and mills, answered a thousand foolish questions, called out a hundred warnings, directed his charges' attention to various details of the work, listened to cries and exclamations, and was weary and disgusted. And now the eleventh party of twenty chattering visitors awaited him at the gate. He

sighed resignedly—it had to be done, it was part of his job.

"Follow me, please!" he called. "Keep as close together as you can, and let no one wander away from the party. Don't approach any moving machinery, and please touch nothing. The ladies should be careful that their skirts and coats do not come in contact with railings and floors, as there is a lot of oil and grease scattered about wherever we shall go."

He started off. "It's the same old bunch!" he grumbled. "They'll all ask the same silly questions and make the same silly remarks and have the same silly thrills, and when I have brought them out they won't know any more than they do now!"

"I suppose you have seen all the school-teachers you will care to see for the remainder of your life. I know you are worn out—I can tell it by your eyes."

Bridges started. For some distance he had been walking by the side of a young woman, but he had hardly glanced at her. It was she who had spoken to him. Now he turned and looked at her.

Why, she was pretty! She didn't wear glasses, and the rosy flush of health was in her cheeks. Her tiny ears beneath her rich brown hair were very pink, her lips were full and ruby red, her eyes were beautiful eyes, and her voice was a pleasing voice. Bridges had collected these details in an instant. "She's deucedly attractive, but she hasn't a screen face," he told himself before he replied to her remark.

"Oh, no, miss; I rather enjoy this," he lied pleasantly.

"I am so glad I could get to visit the mills," she went on. "I'm from the West, from the wheat country, and I never saw any of the great industries such as this. All that I know about metal working I learned in Dan Miller's blacksmith shop, watching him shoe a mule or cut a wagon tire. I knew a young man once who had worked in the mills at Steelburg. His name was Gay, Welling-

ton Gay. You don't know whether he is now working here, do you? But of course you wouldn't."

Bridges gasped, then stopped short—stopped so suddenly that somebody behind him bumped into him. "Is—is your name—er—Screech?" he asked as he moved on.

She laughed with great amusement. "Goodness! Am I shouting so loud as that? But the wheels make such a racket! Not Screech, but Creeth. But how do you know —why do you ask?"

He did not reply; they had come into the mills, where conversation was impossible.

"The woman herself appears!" he chuckled. "Now I see it—I'll finish that play! Why couldn't I get it before? I'll bring them together pretty soon! Heavens, what a chance this is for me!"

He moved away from the girl and did not try to speak to her again. But he shortened the route which he had been following that day and the day before, and soon brought his party into the Open Hearth.

A furnace was tapping. He conducted the visitors to a point where they could see the steel pouring out of the furnace into the ladle, where they could see the giant crane lift the brimming ladle from the pit, where they could watch the teeming of the molten metal. And then he led them to the front of the furnace, where a crew of workmen were making ready for the recharge. They saw the men cringing and shrinking before the terrific heat in which they worked, saw them sledgeing and shoveling and barring, heard them grunt and pant. One of them went closer to the door openings than did the others and stood there examining the bottom of the furnace through the purple-blue glasses he wore, then stooping to peer up at the snow-white roof, shouting out orders to the shovelers and to the men with the bars and the long-handled spoons with which they were working, and then picking up a shovel himself to work with the

others, throwing in the finely crushed stone that lay scattered over the standing.

"Lower!" he shouted suddenly, and the three doors dropped down, and there was a rattle and clatter as the men hurled their shovels and bars and spoons to the iron floor and walked away, flipping the sweat from their brows with curved fingers, mopping their streaming faces with their little cloth caps, running their hands through their wet hair as they went.

Bridges touched the girl on the arm and drew her to one side, to a bench that stood near a group of gas valves.

"If you will sit down here," he said—and he reached up and took down a coat that was hanging on a post near the valves and spread it over the black bench—"you will find more of interest, I believe, than you would if you continued with us. We shall be back this way presently."

"Thank you. I should like to stay here."

She sat down on the bench.

The man who had been giving orders at the furnace was walking toward her now, but he was not looking at her—he was peering over the tops of his blue glasses, with his eyes on the gas valves near which she was sitting. His grotesque appearance made her smile. Then he raised his hand and removed the glasses.

An inarticulate murmur broke from her lips as she leaped to her feet. Then she ran forward, crying: "Why—why, Wally—Mr. Gay!"

He stopped and looked at her, and the glasses fell from his hand, the lenses shattering to pieces on the iron floor.

"Amy! You?"

She came to him with her hand outstretched. He raised his own hand and looked at it. It was sweaty and dirty and stained with iron ore. He rubbed it vigorously up and down the leg of his trousers, then shook hands with her.

"Well, how are you, anyhow?" he asked.

"Why—I—I'm so surprised! I'm so glad to see you _____"

"You just set down on that bench, won't you, until I get that gas to goin' again. I've got to keep the furnace hot, you know," he said.

He went to the valves, opened them, walked back to the furnace, watched the flow of the burning gas through the ports for a moment, and then returned and sat down by her side.

"Well, how are you, anyhow?" he asked again, and there was a tremor in his voice.

"Why, how you're trembling, Wally!" she exclaimed.

"I've been workin' pretty hard, gettin' that heat of steel out," he mumbled.

"And how red your face is! Have you been burned?"

"No, it's the furnace—watchin' the roof and the bath all the time."

"And your hands!"

He turned them up as they lay on his knees, and she reached over and touched the calloused spots in the palms. "Why, they're hard as rocks! And there's an ugly burn!"

"Pooh! That's nothin'."

"Wally, you're working too hard, just as you did for John Peterson."

"I'm workin' hard, all right, but I'm gettin' ahead, Amy. I'm makin' steel now. That's my furnace there, Number Four, the best and fastest furnace in the plant! And that's my steel in that ladle they're pourin' yonder—seventy tons of it—I made it!" There was a note of pride in his voice that thrilled her.

She asked him questions about his work, and then they began talking about the wheat country where she lived and where he had worked, and he had a hundred questions to ask her—about Ike Dooler and Pete Peddy and old Katy Podkins, and about Peterson's nephew and about the elevator, and about the old horse with which he had made his trips to Wheaton.

Suddenly she cried out: "Oh, dear, here they are coming back! Now I must go, and I don't suppose—I don't suppose I shall see you again! I'm going to start home to-night. My train leaves at ten o'clock. Oh, how I dread that long trip—two days and two nights!"

He got up and went to the gas valves, with which he worked for a minute or two. Then he came back and took his place beside her.

"Couldn't I—couldn't I—" he began but stopped, confused.

"Why couldn't you come down to the hotel this evening and take me to the train?" she asked quickly.

"I'll come," he replied. He smiled at her in a way that made her cheeks go a rosier red than they were.

"That will be just fine! I'm at the Hotel Weston. Ask for me at the desk and they will telephone to my room. About seven?"

"I'll be there at seven."

"Without fail?"

"Oh, sure!"

"Good-by till then."

Bridges came with his party, and there was a satisfied look on his face—he had not been so cheerful for two days. One of the group, a young woman wearing thick-lensed glasses, looked sharply at Wally as she passed him, and her thin lips were crooked by a sneer as she went on.

Wally continued on with his work, bantered and jollied the remainder of the day by his fellow workmen. But he was unresponsive to their gibes—he seemed not to hear them. Never had he given closer attention to his furnace, never had he kept it hotter, its roof nearer the dripping point, never had he pushed it along at such rate of melting speed. And that day Number Four broke the record for running time.

An hour before the quitting whistle was due to blow he asked his foreman for permission to leave. Taking his lunch pail he hurried out of the plant and to the Grand

House, where he sought out the major and told him what had occurred that day. The major swore joyously, he laughed, he smacked his hands together.

"What luck, Wally! What luck you're running into all the time! Why, this is delightful! Think of that girl coming here and finding you in such a manner! It's romance! It's poetry! Now then, I'm going to doll you up and get you started toward the city. I'm going to be your valet this evening. The first thing on the program is for you to trot downstairs to the barber shop and tell Jimmy Jiggers to give you everything he's got, and to give it to you quick. Hurry up, son; hurry up!"

Wally grinned and obeyed, and while he was gone the old man went into his room and laid out the two suits of clothes he had helped his protégé to purchase, brought out the four pairs of socks and the two pairs of shoes, chuckling over them as he worked with them. And when the younger man came back there was much arguing and disputing and threatening, with the major having his own way and selecting the suit, the shirt, the tie, the socks and the shoes that were to be worn for that wonderful occasion. And he fell to with a zeal unheard of in the major, assisting in the dressing, smoothing out imaginary wrinkles in the new black suit, helping to tie the flowing tie, with his own hands setting the tie pin and adjusting and readjusting it, poking at the cuffs, brushing the shiny shoes, smoothing and creasing the hat. Once he ran into his own room to fetch a box of powder.

"Your face is altogether too red, Wally—I'll touch up the bright spots again. Jimmy Jiggers didn't put enough on." And he dabbed the fiery-red skin, where the furnace heat had touched it, with the white powder.

"Now put on your hat," he ordered. "Put it on straight! That's it! Now keep it on straight—you're not going up to Vinegar Gully! There! By gad, Wally, I'm proud of you! Turn round—so! You'll do. Now then, beat it—get down to the Hotel Weston just as quick as a street car will carry you. And say, son, keep your

hands out of your pockets; don't pick your callouses; keep that hat off your ear; and when you talk use a 'g' now and then. Don't say 'goin'—say 'going'; don't say 'walkin'—say 'walking.' Ing! Ing! Ing! Don't forget! Wait a minute—hand me that powder. Golly, Wally, what a beak! Why don't you wear a nose glove of some kind when you're working at that furnace? But she'll think you're blushing. Now, don't forget——"

There was a knock at the door. The major swung it open. Butch Magee stood there, Butch Magee from the Open Hearth.

"Say, Wally, Manning wants you should come out to-night and work Four," said the messenger, peering into the room and grinning at what he there beheld. "Felding is sick and can't come out, and Four is charged with a special."

The major exploded in awful wrath. He raved, he foamed, he swore, he threatened. "Tell him he won't be there!" he shouted. "Tell him he can't come! Tell him he won't come! And you light out of here, Butch—get out of here quick!" He advanced upon the messenger with clenched fists, and Butch Magee retreated down the hallway, grinning and chuckling.

Wally stood looking at the floor for a moment. Then he walked to the door and stepped out into the hallway.

"Hey, Butch, tell them I'll be down there in ten or fifteen minutes."

The major sat down heavily, folding his arms and saying not a word. In grim silence he watched Wally disrobe, watched him put on his old stained working suit, watched him lay his finery on the bed. Then he rose and went out without a word, and a few moments later from his room floated the strains of *The Serenade*.

Wally went to the hotel's kitchen, had a pail of lunch packed and trudged off to the mills.

In the Hotel Weston Amy Creeth sat and waited, watching the clock—saw the hands point to seven, to eight, to nine, to nine-thirty. Then she sighed, had her

baggage brought out, and departed for the railway station.

"I suppose he doesn't care," she murmured, and she was so silent that her companion, a young woman wearing thick-lensed glasses, became irritated.

"For goodness' sake, Amy, say something!" she complained. "You're as glummy as a mummy! Or are you preoccupied with thinking about that red-faced lout with whom you had such a long tête-à-tête at the steel mills this morning? I wish I hadn't gone there. What a hideous place it was! Why doesn't that porter hurry and make our berths down? Why weren't they ready for us?"

Amy Creeth did not reply. With her face pressed close against the car window she was peering out into the darkness through which the train was now rapidly moving. Soon, by the appearance of hundreds of lights and spots of fire in the blackness in whatever direction she looked, she knew the train was approaching Steelburg. She caught glimpses of towering black stacks, and she saw great clouds of smoke and steam, and there were rivers of red and yellow running here and there, and sparks and tongues of flame leaping upward, while everywhere the sky was rosy red.

The steel mills! She pressed her face closer to the window, wondering if these were the mills she had visited that morning, and in what part of them she had been—where it was she had talked with Wally Gay. And as she looked she noticed a square frame of light up in the side of a tall black building, and just then the head and shoulders of a man moved into and occupied the lighted square. What if that were Wally Gay! But it couldn't be he—he would not be working to-night. But suppose it were he! She glanced at her companion and seeing her eyes closed she raised her handkerchief and waved it, dropping it quickly and blushing at her foolishness. Then her heart gave a leap, for, by the light that streamed out of the square from behind the man, it seemed to her—yes,

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she was certain of it—he was waving his hand! She watched him until another building shut him from her sight.

Up in the Open Hearth, Wally Gay had gone to a window near his furnace and thrust out his head. He was very hot and very tired, and the night air was cool and pleasant. Down below, just outside the high fence where the Midline tracks skirted the yards, he saw the lights of a moving passenger train. He wondered what train it was. Could it be Amy Creeth's train? It might be, it might not be—hundreds of trains of different roads left the big city over the Midline tracks. But what difference? How could he think of Amy Creeth any more? He had failed to keep his appointment with her, and had sent her no excuse. What would she think of him? He might have telephoned to her at least—but he had not thought of that. Anyway, who was he? A roughneck, a lowbrow! He was not of her class. How did he dare think of such a woman? Still, he wished he could have seen her again, could have told her good-by. Maybe she was on that train down there. No harm about it, and nobody would know—and he took off his little cloth cap and waved it at the train speeding away through the darkness, waved it until the lights of the last coach had disappeared.

At that same hour Bridges, in his room, was feverishly writing the last lines of a photoplay. Walking up and down his room, he read the pages of his finished manuscript, chuckling over them, gloating. "It's a hit! It's bound to go!" he told himself over and over.

"It's the best—it's really the only decent bit of work I've ever accomplished! It will take!" And as he folded the manuscript and addressed an envelope, and then addressed another envelope—this one to himself—he muttered: "No use of my sending that self-addressed envelope—that manuscript is not coming back!" But he put it in.

And at that same hour Randolph U. Jackson, stock

clerk at Susie Blast Furnace, known about the mills only as Tootsy, who for some reason never determined had fallen behind with his work, and was working overtime trying to catch up, sat at his desk listening to the talk of a sad-faced young man who sat near by.

"Yes, Tootsy, I'm back on my old job again, and they've stuck off a lot of night work on me. But that's all right—I'll get a day or two off later on," the sad-faced young man was saying. "You see, Tootsy, I didn't seem to fit in over there at the big office. I was a little bit out of my element, I guess—something like a fish in a flour bin. I made two or three little bulls and balled things up a trifle. Under the rosebush, Tootsy, I made some pretty darned big bulls. . . . No, thanks, Tootsy, I'm not chewing to-night. But Mr. Calla treated me mighty white. Mr. Calla isn't a bad sort of scout, Tootsy, and he has a nice lot of young men on his force. He said to me: 'Robert, if you care to return to your old position I shall indeed be glad to have you there. You were the best shipping clerk I ever had.' Pretty decent of Mr. Calla, wasn't it? I'm glad he did that. Otherwise I would have had to go out of here on the tramp, letting it be known that I was leaving to take a bigger, better job with a bigger, better company, as they all say when they fall down and get the G. B. Now I am letting it be understood that my lungs are weak and the doctor ordered me out of the office into the open air. But between you and me and the henhouse door, Tootsy, I simply couldn't cut the cheese."

CHAPTER IX

JANUS DAMROSCH, DETECTIVE

HARVEY McNUTT, yardmaster at Steelburg Mills, sat in his office with his feet elevated to the top of his desk, smoking a pipe and staring at the toes of his shoes. McNutt occupied this position so frequently and busied himself so persistently with smoking a pipe and staring at the toes of his shoes that there were those, many of them, who thought he never did anything else. And going through the yards on their way to and from work and looking in at the window of his office they would say, "Pretty soft! Ain't he got a puddin'? Draggin' down his two fifty a month and doin' nothin' but settin' on the small of his back, smokin' his dudeen and lookin' at his brogans! Pretty soft!"

But if McNutt made a sinecure of his job through a good portion of each day it was because he knew how to handle that job of his. He was taking care of it all the while, working hardest when he appeared to be loafing hardest, taking care of it so efficiently that he had held the position for nearly thirty years, drawing good pay and a secret bonus, and in that time had never once been on the carpet.

McNutt was an old fox, hard to fool and cute at getting out of a trap when he had been caught, for he was fallible and would now and then put his foot in it. He knew what was going on about Steelburg Mills, McNutt did. He knew just how long Number One Battery Boilers could run before they would need coal, though the boiler superintendent might warn him he would have to shut down in thirty minutes if he did not get coal. He knew

there were five loaded cars of pig iron at the cupola dock when the Bessemer foreman told him there were but two left. When the Open Hearth began calling wildly for scrap and the blast furnaces for limestone he would shut them up by informing them just what surplus they had on hand. He let the shipping department do the worrying about empties for outside shipment—boxes and flats and gons—for he always had a few extras tucked away in some corner of the yards and when they were actually needed he would produce them.

He was clever, too, at choosing and handling men, McNutt was. In hiring, nine times out of ten he could pick the winners—the fellows who wanted to work, could work and would work. He recognized a boomer as far as he could see him, and by some peculiar sixth or seventh sense he picked out the agitators and kickers and soreheads and turned them down before they had finished asking for the job. He had some bad cases of booze on his time book, and one or two of nerves, but he managed them skillfully.

When Pippy Peeler, one of his best switchmen, would report for duty with whisky under his belt and a bottle in each hip pocket McNutt would laugh, take the bottles, pour out the contents, refill them with cold tea and return them to the man's pockets and get a good day's work out of Pippy.

When Bosco Riley would come to the yardmaster's office diffused with tears McNutt would give the weeper his own handkerchief, lock him in a closet and tell him to cry it out, and go out into the yards and do Bosco's work himself an hour or two until Bosco's eyes were drained dry.

And when Jack-the-Giant-Killer Smith, who suffered from periodical attacks of hives, during which attacks he would run amuck and try to mop up the yards, McNutt would sit down on Jack-the-Giant-Killer so hard that his hives would quit him forthwith—to stay quit for another month.

He wasn't in his office all the time, McNutt wasn't. When a worried conductor of a yard engine would put his head in at the yardmaster's door and hesitatingly announce, "Got a car off the track down in K Yard back of the pig machine and can't get her on. Awful mess there—that water main's burst again. Better send for the wrecking crew, hadn't we?" McNutt would promptly answer, "No—I'll come down!"

And he'd slip on an old suit of overalls and a pair of gum boots and go down to K Yard and crawl under the derailed car and reset the frogs and call for more timbers for blocking, and he'd lay a piece of old board here and a chunk of scrap iron there and a billet or two somewhere else, and then he would crawl out and say, "Back her up!" And the car would take the rails. If it wasn't crossways the tracks McNutt wouldn't call for the wrecking crew.

Not at his desk all the time, smoking his pipe and staring at his shoes, was the yardmaster, but because he knew how to handle his job he was there a good part of his time. And he took many a pleasant little nap there, too, with his feet elevated to the level of his head, for McNutt was getting old—and after thirty years on one job that job becomes more or less humdrum. But he wasn't napping this morning when a shipping clerk opened his door, entered his office and climbed to the top of the table that stood next to his desk. He was trying to figure out how he was going to get that drag of twenty-seven cars of ore in from the Midline and that drag of eighteen cars of billets out to the Transfer and keep things moving with three engines out of commission and in the dummy house.

"What d'ye know about that, Mack?" demanded the shipping clerk. "Here I've just had a letter from my old home town—Honeyburg on the White Fork, you know—and they tell me Uncle Lonnio Dugglebunner is dead. Died in his little J. P. office back of the store—died in his chair at his desk. And dead three days, they say, with people looking in at his window and thinking he

was asleep all the time and didn't want to wake him up. What d'ye know about it? Old Doc Black couldn't find out what killed him, and his folks wanted to know, so they sent to Columbus for a specialist and he came and pronounced Uncle Lonnie's death due to his sitting on the small of his back so much with his lower extremities elevated too high. The blood ran out of his feet and legs, you know, and flooded his head, or something like that. What d'ye know about that, Mack? I got to thinking about you sitting here all the time with your feet up—"

McNutt's feet came down from the top of the desk and struck the floor with a bang.

"Jannie," he called to his clerk, Janus Damrosch, next room, "run out and tell Pippy Peeler to shoot three cars of coke up to Susie Blast Furnace, then to pig the foundry and then to go out to the Midline and fetch in that drag of ore. Then go and tell Holliday to coke the cupolas, ram a couple of empties up to the rod deck and then stick that drag of billets in A Yard out on the Transfer. Hello, Bob, what's the glad word?"

"What d'ye know about it, Mack? Did you ever see more work going on about this old dump than there is right now? I'm busier than a mowing machine with the team running away. I don't believe I'll ever get caught up with my work. Haven't got an old plug of spit-quick lying about your desk that somebody dropped? Ah, there! That's the boy!"

"What d'ye know about it, Mack? There was something in the rumor I heard that they were going to put up fourteen new Open Hearth furnaces back of the pig machine, eh? Well, you'll see Wally Gay getting something good out of it. He's making out big over there with Manning, as assistant foreman. And they tell me that old Rattlebones Mackenzy, chief engineer for the whole dump, you know, has taken a great shine to Wally—hanging round him like a horsefly round a slumbering mule. Comes out every now and then and gets him over

in a corner and has a chat with him. What d'ye know about that, Mack? Old Rattlebones is a big man too. He runs all to brains—he doesn't weigh over ninety pounds.

"It seems that when they were constructing that new furnace over there Wally caught a bad bull somebody had made in Rattlebones' office—something about their calculations. Oh, Wally's there with chiming bells when it comes to figures, Mack! And I was the boy that discovered him—yes, sir, I was the first one in the plant to find out that Wally Gay had a full bean on him. What d'ye know about it?

"Funny about Wally, wasn't it—his coming here in a box car of pig, growing up in the mills, sticking right here and getting ahead as he has without any kind of pull, haul or drag. I'd just like to know where he came from, who put him in that car of iron, and why. I've often thought, Mack, if somebody here had had the foresight to keep the number of the car he came in he might be traced—

"Gosh, here comes the Old Man! Psst! Say, Mack, I don't want him to catch me loafing in here! Take the cue, Mack!"

The shipping clerk slipped from the table to the floor and jerked a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket.

"Take the cue, Mack! Take the cue," he hissed.

The door opened.

"Yes, Mack, I've got to get three cars of billets shipped out to-day without fail. Good morning, Mr. Goodlow! They're in D Yard, Mack. You'll see that they go out, won't you, Mack? I'm in a rush—so long! To-day, Mack!"

The door slammed behind a hurriedly retreating shipping clerk. Goodlow laughed.

"Old stuff, McNutt, old stuff! I've pulled that ancient gag myself many a time in my younger days. I'll bet that chap wasn't in here to see you about billet shipments, was he, now?"

McNutt chuckled.

"No, he was talking about Wally Gay," he said.

"Is that so? Two minds with but a single thought! That's what I came in here to talk about—Wally Gay."

McNutt looked interested.

"I've been thinking a good deal about that young fellow lately. He is going ahead in his work so rapidly and is proving himself possessed of so many sterling qualities that I keep wondering who he is and where he came from. I am sure there is good stock in him. Mackenzy has been talking to him—"

Goodlow broke off in his speech and turned in his chair to see who had entered the office. It was McNutt's man, Janus Damrosch. The clerk passed through the room into his own office, but in a moment, just as Goodlow turned to McNutt, he came quietly back and went to a high desk in a corner of the office, where he took down a file of orders which he began looking over.

"Mackenzy has been talking to him considerably of late," resumed Goodlow, "and he has told me that the man has a remarkable mathematical mind. He has persuaded him to leave the mills and take a position in the engineering department. That's a wise move. I doubt if Wally realizes what good fortune this is, but he will find out soon—if he doesn't already know. Mackenzy has started work on the new Open Hearth plant we are to build. By the time those fourteen furnaces are built and in operation a year or so hence Wally will know more about the Open Hearth than most superintendents do. There isn't one Open Hearth superintendent in a hundred, McNutt, that ever stuck a test bar into a furnace. Manning is an exception—he worked up from the floor.

"But who is Wally Gay? That's what I'd like to know. It's none of my business, of course, and I know it doesn't make a bit of difference who he is, but just the same the more I see of him the stronger grows my curiosity about his origin. You're an old-timer here, McNutt—do you recall when he—when he arrived?"

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"Oh, to be sure! I remember seeing old Joe Gay walking up through the yard with the little box tucked under his arm, that had the baby in it."

"Was any effort ever made to find out where he came from?"

"Not a bit—nobody was interested in him except old Joe and he wanted to hold on to him."

"I wonder now if anybody kept the number of the car in which he came?"

"Yes, Joe must have kept it, for Wally knows the number—and I can get it."

"Eh? You can? How? Did you keep a record of it?"

"Why I made a blue-pencil cross before the car number in the yard clerk's book that day. Seven or eight years ago, when Wally was about eighteen, I think, that same car floated back into these yards. Wally ran across it and came to me, asking some questions about it. I was pretty sure at once that this was his car, but I couldn't ask him. You know, that subject has always been a ticklish one to mention to Wally. I went upstairs to the old file room and hunted it up. I made a memorandum of it at the time, but I did not keep it long."

"Suppose you could find it again?"

"Certainly—the files are all there yet, so far as I know."

"The car number might—but that wouldn't furnish much information, would it? I wonder if it could be determined who shipped that car of iron?"

"The receiving clerk's records would show that. They may be on file in the attic of the laboratory."

"Get me that car number some time, McNutt, will you? And just keep it to yourself that I asked you for it. I wouldn't want it known that I was prying into—"

He stopped suddenly in his speech and turned his head. McNutt's clerk was standing at the desk in the corner of the room, his back to it, looking at the two men. His mouth had dropped partly open and his face showed

he was listening with interest to what was being said.

"Is that all you've got to do?" demanded Goodlow sharply.

The clerk seized a bunch of orders and hurried from the room.

"Who is that squint-eyed yap, McNutt?" asked Goodlow in a nettled tone. "He was taking it all in, wasn't he?"

"My clerk, Jannie Damrosch. I hired him when Calla ditched him some months ago. Makes a clever clerk, but he's awful nosy."

"Well, you just give him a tip that I'll nosey him out of here if he repeats anything he heard us saying! Get me that car number sometime, McNutt, and say nothing about it."

"All right, I'll hunt it up."

Goodlow left the yardmaster's office.

"Hey, Jannie!" called McNutt. And when the clerk appeared he stared at him a full minute before he spoke. "Jannie, hereafter when a man the size of Mr. Goodlow comes into this office I want you to make yourself invisible. And say, young man, you'll last about as long on this job as a snowball in a blast furnace if you repeat anything you overheard us—"

"I didn't hear anything!"

"You're a liar, Jannie! And if you tell me another as bald as that one I'll can you so quick it'll make your hair curl more than it does now! Go out and tell Jack-the-Giant-Killer to coal the Bessemer and then to give the coke ovens a drag of coal."

Janus Damrosch left the office and McNutt lighted his pipe, elevated his feet to the top of the desk and began staring at the toes of his shoes. He had sat in this position ten minutes or more when the door opened.

"What d'ye know about that, Mack?" demanded a shipping clerk, stepping in. "Pretty dog-gone cute, eh? Flummied the Old Man right, didn't I? But you didn't take the cue as you should, Mack—you're too slow.

Where'd you toss that old plug of spit-quick? Just a small munch. Gr-r-r-r! Gosh, isn't that plug dry? And hard too! Gee-whiz! What d'ye know about that Mack? I've snapped a tooth off! There it is! Well I'll be dogged! And I paid old Doc Dirtyneck six dollars to cap that tooth less than three months ago! Wouldn't that bump you? What d'ye know about it?

"But I don't think the Old Man would have said anything even if he had caught me loafing here and I hadn't wooled him with that old gag. Dandy fellow, isn't he? You didn't hear about his chasing Tunky Lord out of the yard with a billet hook the other day, did you? Tunky, you know, stands in that little dog cottage at the end of the cooling tank back of the billet mill where the billets run out, and keeps them from falling off the conveyor. Well, the Old Man goes by that way and sees Tunky sitting on a nail keg sound asleep with all kinds of billets tumbling off the conveyor for the bohunks to pick up. He climbs up, takes Tunky's hook and does the job while Tunky snoozes. What d'ye know about that, Mack?

"It would have turned out all right, too, but when Tunky ate his lunch that day he had a gallon or so of cold tea left and he set his pail up on a stringer right over where he was working. Well, the jar and vibration of the machinery started the pail to edging off the stringer, edging off, edging off, you know, and all at once it comes kerflop on the Old Man's coco, tea and all.

"Tunky woke up just as it splashed and Tunky was so tickled that he giggled. That riled the Old Man and with crimson in his eyes he made a wicked lunge at Tunky with the billet hook. They say Tunky went out of there like a paper wad out of a popgun with the Old Man right after him, beat it across the gas house, hurdled a cut of cars and went up that twelve-foot fence back of the bloomer like a cat with nine toes to a foot. He landed on the Midline tracks and streaked it and didn't come back to work until to-day. What d'ye know about that, Mack?

"Say, that tooth hurts some! Well, I've got to be galloping—got a scow of work to unload. Say, Mack, what d'ye know about it? Here old Curly-Locks stops me out in the yard a while ago and wants to know things about Wally Gay."

"Who?" asked McNutt, opening his eyes.

"Curley-Locks—Squint-Lamps—Big-Beak—Fish-Chin—Two-Mugs! Don't you know your own tiger? Your man, Friday—old Nosey-Nose."

"Oh, he has, eh? What was he saying?"

"Oh, asking me if I knew who Wally's parents were. I told him to toddle over and frisk Wally for that information. Don't I wish he would? And don't I wish I could be gazing through a knot hole when he did? Oh, no—maybe I don't! Well, Mack, what d'ye know about it? I'm off!"

The office door slammed behind the shipping clerk and immediately flew open in front of him.

"Say, Mack, don't forget what I told you about Uncle Lonnie Dugglebunner dying from sitting on the small of his back too much! What d'ye know——"

The closing door shut half of the question outside.

At twelve o'clock McNutt called his clerk.

"I'm going to lunch and I won't be back for a couple of hours," he said. "I've left some orders here on my desk. Hand them out to the men as they come in."

The clerk after the yardmaster had gone untied a newspaper parcel and hurriedly ate the lunch it contained. Then he took an electric torch and climbed up into the attic where the files of old car records were kept.

"Seven or eight years ago!" he muttered as he flashed the light over the stacks of black and dusty records piled about the walls. "It'll be a job! A chance in a thousand if I find it at all! But that shipping clerk said he was certain it was in June. I'll look over the June records for those two years."

He spent a half hour going over the dusty pages of a huge volume. Another half hour he pored over a second

volume. He was about to close the book and give up his search when he noticed a heavy smudgy line following down the margin of the page before the row of car numbers, as though a thick finger, black with dust, had been dragged over the sheet. He followed it to the bottom of the page, found it on the next sheet, turned a page and found it there. And he watched it page after page until it stopped before a blue-pencil crossmark.

"There it is!" he chuckled. "P. G. M. 67677!"

And he took out a notebook from his pocket and copied the number and initials. Then he copied into the book the numbers of and initials of the five cars below and of the five cars above P. G. M. 67677. He also set down the year, the month and the day of the month as he read them at the top of the page.

"There may be something in it sometime!" he mumbled. "Good case to work up anyway. It'll be good experience."

He was about to return the book to its place when he stopped, brought it out again, opened it and turned to the page he had just been examining.

"Get the original whenever it is possible," he laughed. "That's what the book says." And he took a penknife from his pocket and carefully cut out the page, which he folded and stowed away in a bill fold. He then put the record back into its place and went down to his desk.

That afternoon he stopped in at the basement of the chemical laboratory, where he visited for a few moments with the janitor, condoling with him over his hard job and low salary and leaving a cigar with him. And the next afternoon he dropped in on the janitor again and left another cigar and a word of cheer. The third afternoon he asked for and received the key to the attic of the building where several tons of old accounting-department records were stored.

He had worked formerly for Chief Clerk Calla for a few months until Mr. Calla had discovered that he was not up to the standard of the class of men he wished to

have on his force. His work had been on the receiving-clerk's desk, and the knowledge he had there gained relative to the manner of classifying and tabulating incoming shipments now enabled him to find quickly the information he was seeking.

Back at his desk in the yardmaster's office, he entered this new data in his notebook—"Shipped by Masterson and Kirk from Ferro Junction."

He mused over the entry for some time.

"It's the Stanley Kirk Furnace Company now—Masterson got out a long while ago," he said, talking to himself. "Masterson went into politics. I'll take a run down to Ferro Junction some of these days and look around. It's about ten miles south of here on the R. T. V. Not much of a case, but it will give me some experience."

He put away the notebook and drew a paper-bound volume from a drawer in his desk, the title of which was, "How to Become a Detective." He turned to Lesson Ten and began reading.

It was several days afterward that McNutt took a flash light and climbed up into the attic, pulled out an old car-record volume from a great stack and began running over its entries. Page after page he turned until he was almost through the volume. Then he turned back to the front and began anew.

"That's funny!" he muttered. "I'm pretty sure I found it that time somewhere about the middle of the book."

He continued his search, bending over the volume until his back ached and his eyes blurred from the constant searching.

"This is the record—no mistake about that—and it ought to be right about here," he said. "That blue-pencil mark couldn't have faded and that sheet couldn't have worked out and got lost."

But he began looking at the numbers at the tops of the pages. Then he swore. A page was missing! And

forcing the book wider open he discovered the cut stub of the missing sheet.

He put the volume back into the place and went down to his office, where he lighted his pipe, sat down at his desk, elevated his feet and proceeded to stare at the toes of his shoes. For ten, for fifteen, for twenty minutes he sat motionless. Then he dropped his feet, straightened up in his chair and reached over and drew a block of yellow forms from a pigeonhole on the top one of which he wrote a line or two.

"Hey, Damrosch!" he called. And when his clerk came he handed him the yellow slip.

"What's this?" asked the clerk as he took the slip.

"That's your card for good behavior. Take it to the time office and Bottman will pay you up to six o'clock this evening."

"Discharged?"

"Canned!"

"What for?"

"Ask yourself—don't ask me!"

"Will—you give me a recommend?"

"I wouldn't give you a recommend for a job wheeling shale at the brickyards! Get out! And if I thought you had that page you cut out of that record upstairs about you I'd have it if I had to break your neck getting it! But I know you haven't got it on your person. Get out!"

The clerk made no reply, and while he was clearing out his desk preparatory to leaving, McNutt smoked and mused.

"He did it, of course!" he told himself. "Nobody else! But what for? What for? That's what I'd like to know. I wonder if I should tell Wally? Perhaps I should, but I don't like to—I don't like the idea of broaching that subject to him. I guess I won't."

There was no need of his worrying over the question whether Wally Gay should be informed of Damrosch's

STEEL PREFERRED

act—Damrosch himself attended to the conveying of that information and very promptly. For after the discharged clerk had been paid his wages at the time office he walked down through the yards to the site of the new Open Hearth plant where work had been begun and where, he was told, Wally Gay was now occupied. He had never seen Wally Gay—he might as well take a look at him.

CHAPTER X

A RISE IN STEEL

DAMROSCH found a great army of men at work on the new site, unloading brick and sand and gravel and crushed stone; constructing temporary frame buildings; excavating long trenches and deep pits; mixing concrete and mortar; laying brick and pouring concrete. He stopped near a bed of cement mortar in which a man puddled with a hoe.

"Do you know Wally Gay when you see him?" he asked the mortar mixer.

"Sure! That's him over there by the engineer—the feller with the yell'er corduroys on."

Damrosch looked in the direction the man indicated and saw two men standing near a surveyor's instrument. One of them was figuring or writing in a book which he held on the curve of his left arm; the other was intently watching the proceedings. The onlooker was dressed in drab corduroys and the cap he wore was of the same material. His figure was very straight and there was a hint of strength about it and a gracefulness that the ill-fitting suit of coarse cloth could not conceal.

"By George!" muttered Damrosch. "There isn't anything scrubby about his looks!"

The engineer finished his writing or calculation, slipped his book into a wide pocket of his coat and turned to his transit, which he began adjusting and leveling. The young man in drabs picked up a handful of slender pointed iron stakes and a steel tape. Under the direction of the engineer he moved off a hundred feet or so and stopped to set a stake; walked on and set another stake

and another, and so approached the spot where Damrosch was standing. The engineer drew his book from his pocket and again busied himself with a pencil. Damrosch walked forward and spoke.

"Are you Wally Gay?"

"Yes."

"Er—how would you like to have me look up something of your early history for you?"

"What?"

Damrosch started. There was something disturbing in the voice that hurled the monosyllable at him. A wiser man would have turned and gone away. Damrosch stayed. And again he spoke, though not so confidently.

"Why—er—I'd think it'd be rather awkward not to know something of your own family—who your parents were—to have people speaking of you as—hum—well, you see, Gay, I happened to find out the number of the car you were brought here in and I've learned where the car was shipped from and who shipped it. Now, if I set to work on the case I might discover something that would ——"

He stopped. The feeling of uneasiness that had been growing upon him since that first sharp question now gave way to positive fear, for the iron stakes and the steel tape that Wally held in his hands had fallen clattering to the ground and his eyes were blazing with anger.

"You dirty little slant-eyed skunk!" he shouted. "Who asked you to butt in on my private affairs?"

He raised a clenched fist and took two steps forward. Damrosch took three steps backward, tripped over a bag of cement and splashed full length into the mortar bed. He scrambled to his feet, grabbed a bedraggled hat, waded out and streamed across the yard toward the gate.

And as he went he was saying to himself, "Now I will! Now I will trace him! I'll block his game! I'll fix him!"

"What's the row?" asked the engineer, coming up.

"Private matter," replied Wally shortly.

The engineer looked at his assistant a moment.
"All right, Wally. Now we'll locate that south pier.
Get the rod."

Running lines, driving stakes, checking and rechecking measurements, carrying the transit here and there and helping to set it up; looking over the engineer's shoulder as he worked out his calculations; sitting with him in the little rough frame shack behind the great piles of building materials; talking with him, asking questions, learning, learning, learning—learning facts he had never dreamed of knowing, always buoyed up by that same fervor and enthusiasm that had buoyed him up in whatever work he had undertaken. And when one day Hofer, the engineer, handed him a great sheet of paper thickly covered with figures and said to him carelessly, "Look over my calculations, Wally, and see if I have made any mistakes," he shivered with pleasure. And another day when the engineer sent him out for the first time to make a measurement alone he glowed with pride because of the confidence placed in him by his superior, and he laughed aloud and threw the steel tape high into the air, catching it as it fell.

"Getting on!" he whispered.

The excavations deepened day by day and the trenches stretched out to greater and greater lengths; the steam cranes came chugging in over new-laid tracks and reached out their black arms over the great holes down in the dirty depths of which men picked and shoveled and blasted in clay and sand and rock. And the masons came in with trowels and plumb bobs and levels and the crane arms began lowering boxes of brick and huge steel buckets of mortar and concrete and the foundations of furnaces and stacks and piers crept slowly upward.

With eyes that glistened Wally watched it all, letting no phase of the work, no detail of it escape him. And when Hofer was absent for an hour or two, or was busy with some affair of his own, he would hurry out and get into the work himself—taking a hoe and helping the

mortar mixer mix a box of mortar; tugging and lifting and heaving with a gang of sailors as they set some huge casting in place; climbing down into the excavations and dumping a box of sand or concrete, or carrying bricks to the masons; giving a hand to the carpenters placing their concrete forms; assisting the boiler makers with their heavy slabs and sheets of steel.

As though he watched the building of his own house he watched the beginning of the construction of the new Open Hearth, and more than once his eye caught errors—mistakes made by mason or carpenter—for he knew how things should be there. He had driven the stakes, he had carried the tape, he had helped to make the measurements and the figures were in his head and not forgotten. And every day he was poring over the great blue map that lay spread out on Hofer's desk, learning to read and understand it, studying its details, memorizing them.

"The best man I ever had for a helper," Hofer told Mackenzy. "Couldn't get along without him—couldn't possibly get along. Don't ask me for him while I'm on this job."

"But I'm going to," returned Mackenzy. "I'm going to take him into the office in a week or two."

Hofer begged and pleaded, protested and threatened, but to no avail.

"No, I want him. I didn't induce him to leave his old positon to work with you continuously. He's been out here about long enough. I will give you young Shofner—Shofner is all right." And Mackenzy walked away.

Wally received orders one afternoon to report to Mackenzy's office the following morning. It was the first time he had been there. He saw thirty or forty men bending over tables and drawing-boards, busy with pencils and pens and rulers. Most of them he noticed, were smoking pipes, cigars or cigarettes, and most of them were talking and laughing. The racket and din in the room was so great that he did not hear a sad-faced young man of sixteen or seventeen summers, seated at a desk

near a door opening into another room, speaking to him. The sad-faced youth left his chair and came over to him.

"Who'd you want to see?" he asked.

"Mr. Mackenzy sent me word to come here this morning," replied Wally.

"Isn't here yet—neither's Bolling. Set down over here by my desk—they'll be along."

Wally sat down. The young man dropped into his chair and at once started to talk.

"Say, I seen a dandy fillum at the Bandbox Theater last night—Custer's Last Fight. Believe me, them Indians could ride! They'd hang onto their horses by their feet and shoot under their bellies—the horses' bellies, you know. Gee, it was a great show! I seen another peach of a fillum at the Bi-jow night before last that was all right too. Captain Kidd, the Pirate. Some picture, kiddo, that was! Go much?"

"Not much," replied Wally.

"Here's Rattlebones now. That's his office there. Go on in.

"Well, you're on hand, I see," was Mackenzy's greeting to Wally as he entered the chief engineer's office. "I have thought that I would let you work with Jimmy Sloan, our print boy, for a few days—that's Jimmy at the desk near my office door—and then I'll have Bolling find you a place. Come out and I'll introduce you to the crowd."

He introduced Wally to each of the men in the big drafting room, none of whom Wally had met before, though some of them he knew by sight, having seen them going through the mills. Bolling he had often talked with when he was assistant foreman at the old Open Hearth, and he did not like him. He found fault with Bolling's perfect knee action when he walked; he did not fancy the suggestion, which always came to him when he saw Bolling, of a crowbar hidden beneath the man's coat, lying along the spinal column; and he hated the perpetual sneer that curled the thin lips of the assis-

tant engineer. None of the draftsmen seemed interested in him, though one of them—Billings—remarked, "I believe I have seen you in the mills."

Jimmy Sloan conducted him to the file room.

"Gee, I'm glad you've come!" said Jimmy. "I've got about a million blue prints to file. Old Rattlebones has had 'em all out lately. Here's the way we do it: File 'em by these letters and numbers in these drawers and then cross index 'em in this book. Most of 'em are old prints. You'll tumble on in a few minutes—it ain't nothin'. Say, I seen a bird of a filum at the Panky-Poo Theater last week. Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. It was all right. Don't put that print in there! Can't you see it's A-4723? It belongs over there! I seen another cuckoo of a filum at the Little Grand—The Belle of Iceland. Believe me, sister, there was some scenery there!"

Jimmy's voice rattled on and the filing of the prints continued steadily. By noon Wally's head was aching from Jimmy's ceaseless rattle and from the close atmosphere of the room in which they worked; and his arms were aching, too—aching to move something heavy, something weightier than these thin sheets of blue paper. But he had found a keen pleasure in his trifling task and a hundred times he had drawn back a print he was thrusting into its drawer to run his eye over its myriad white lines, wondering what they meant.

"We'll print after dinner," Jimmy announced when the work was complete. "Gee, I've got a thousand blue prints to get out!"

They went up to the top floor of the building in a great glass-roofed room and Jimmy set to work.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Wally.

"Oh, just watch me! You'll wise up to the job pretty soon and then you can help me along—it ain't nothin'. Say, I seen a loo-loo of a filum not long ago—Hannibal and Skipio, it was called. Say, it was great! Elephants up to their stummicks in snow; tigers and lions, and coons

with ivory rings in their noses; parrots and ostriches and horses. Some show, I'm here to tell you!"

The work of printing got under way. Jimmy's voice rattled on, but Wally gave attention to the printing only, watching with fascinated eyes and with a pleasurable excitement the tingeing to blue of the white paper, which Jimmy would lock in the frames, as the sun's rays struck upon it, and the creeping out of the myriads of white lines and figures and words. What a lot he was learning, he thought! What a lot there was for him yet to learn! How ignorant he was! Until to-day he had always believed the white lines on the blue prints he had seen had been traced there with white ink. Now he watched the sun drawing them there. He could read the large blue print in Hofer's office, but that was more like a map; these prints were of another kind—complex, incomprehensible. As he handled the crisp clean sheets he wondered if he would ever come to understand them.

One day Bolling told him he could work on the desk near Billings and Billings would show him what he was to do. The draftsman set him to making a telephone roster for the plant, giving him an old roster for a guide. He worked rapidly, but carefully and accurately, and Billings, coming to look over his shoulder, whistled in surprise.

"Say, where did you learn to sling a pencil like that?" he asked. "That's artistic stuff, that is!"

Wally laughed.

"Oh, that's easy enough! I always liked to write and draw."

"That's certainly a little bit of all right! When you finish we'll check it over and then I'll show you how to trace it."

The tracing was begun. Billings watched with an approving eye.

"You've got a pretty good drag with Rattlebones, haven't you?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know that I have! He told me he thought

it would help me if I came here and worked a while."

"Live in Steelburg?"

"Yes."

"Always lived here?"

"All my life."

"Who are your folks? What does your old man do?"

"I haven't got any folks."

"Huh? Haven't any folks? How's that?"

"None of your business!" The words were snapped out in an angry voice.

Billings started back.

"You needn't be so darned crabby about it, need you?"

Wally began to tremble.

"I—I didn't mean to be, but I don't talk about that to anybody."

"Oh, I didn't know! I beg your pardon." And Billings walked away.

Wally came quickly to like Billings and in Billings there developed a high regard for his charge, and what he had looked forward to with dread—breaking in this green man—became a positive pleasure. And when the first intricate tracing was made—his skill and cleverness with the pen had enabled him to come to this phase of the drafting work very soon—Billings looked over it and pronounced it "as nifty a job as any I have ever seen." Whereat there swept over the pupil that glow of pride, flushing his cheek, causing his pulses to leap—the old glow of pride that had always come to him when he had accomplished something that he felt was worth while.

Under Billings' tutelage he was soon learning to decipher the messages the blue prints carried, and questions fell from his lips thick and fast. To learn, to learn—the desire was ever hot within him—he must learn all that these keen-eyed men bending over their drawing-boards knew, for he had come to realize that here in the drafting room were the beginnings of things in steel. Not an engine, not a motor, not a roll train moved until

these men had built it up, torn it down, dissected it piece by piece, tested its every bolt and bearing and casting and forging and had seen it in their minds' eyes doing its work. Not a foundation was laid down that they had not first laid down here; not a furnace was built that they had not first built here; not a stack erected that they had not erected here. Steel could not be made until these men with pens and pencils and rules and scales and protractors had given the word. Here was the beginnings of things in steel! He must learn it all!

The room had learned that he possessed unusual mathematical ability and he was showered with attentions in the shape of requests for aid in checking and figuring stresses and strains and speeds and loads and capacities. Because of his willingness and cheerfulness in performing any kind of task thrust upon him the room good-naturedly named him "the goat," just as the mills had once done. And the room would come to him and slap him on the back and call him a good old scout and then whisper, "Just run your eagle eye over these figures, old socks, and see if I'm right;" or, "Take a slant at this job old Rattlebones has stuck off on me, won't you, and help me out?" Or, "Check up this track curvature for me, young feller—that's the boy!" And never a day went by that some one of the room was not saying with a laugh, "Give it to the goat to do—he eats everything like that!"

Mackenzy was watching him and not infrequently he had him in his office, sounding him, examining him, asking questions, talking with him about different phases of engineering work. And once or twice each week he would send him with some unimportant message to Hofer, always saying as Wally would start to leave the office, "Look round down there for an hour or two and see how things are going."

And Wally would carry the message to Hofer and talk with him a while about the work and then climb

down among the deep-laid foundations and wander through the uncheckered flues and about the clean, dry tunnels and watch the workmen at their tasks and talk with the foremen and give a hand here and there where he saw man power was lacking on some heavy job.

"Big work!" he would whisper to himself. "Big work! I ought to be in it! I must get back—I must do real work!"

One day Mackenzy handed him a thick leather-bound book—it was Michelis' Mathematics and Mechanics.

"Look that over, Wally," he said, "you may find it interesting."

He carried the book to his room at the hotel where he lived and at once buried himself in its pages. Old Major Fronk wandered desolate through the gloomy offices of the Grand House for half the evening, then went to his room, put his violin under his arm and marched in upon the reader.

"What's that you're reading?" he demanded sharply.

"Oh, it's a book about arithmetic and things," replied Wally without looking up.

"It is, eh? Don't you get enough of that sort of stuff through the day at your work but must sit up half the night with it, neglecting me and making me neglect you? Where's that Two Years Before the Mast I gave you to read?"

"I'm almost through that—I'll finish it."

"Oh, you'll finish it, will you? But you toss it aside for some confounded book about arithmetic! What do you think of it?"

"It's fine reading, major, and so is this. Listen to this! It says——"

"I don't want to hear it!" roared the major. "Young man, you're in a fair way to become a one-ideaed jackass if you're going to keep this up, instead of the all-round broad-minded man I hoped to see you develop into. A man can know his work, his profession, from A to Z, Wally, and if that is all he does know he's a dub. When

you've finished your day's stunt at those cussed steel mills for heaven's sake leave your work behind!

"Damn the man that's always tooting the whistle after he quits the shop! Take the case of Henry Pidd. Henry knew engines, Henry did. He invented engines; he built engines; he lived engines, dreamed engines, got sickly rich on engines. He worked with and talked about engines all day, slept with an engine at night, got up with it in the morning. On all other subjects he was as ignorant as a draggled duck—and proud of his ignorance too! Henry didn't know whether Mark Twain was President Lincoln's Secretary of War or the first governor of Rhode Island—and he didn't care.

"For all Henry knew Charles Dickens might have been a biscuit shooter in a Chicago beanery. For him Rome and Troy were in New York, Carthage in Missouri, Athens in Ohio. His knowledge of history and geography was pretty good there—he knew all those cities well—he'd sold engines in each of them. He thought he was smart—he was an ass! And when he was away from his engines, away from men that could talk engines, he had about as many friends as a flea. When he got old and had to retire from business he couldn't find a congenial soul to hobnob with—he made everybody tired with his engine chatter and they ducked him when they saw him coming. Henry died of lonesomeness."

Wally had laid down his book and was listening to the major's tirade with a smile playing about his lips.

"I've been trying to pound something into your system that you will need all through life, something apart from your work and yet of it, too—like oil to machinery. I've taught you to distinguish between a noun and a verb, a conjunction and an adjective; I've whipped you into the habit of hanging on to your "g's" instead of throwing them away as you used to do; I've been through the United States history with you, through the geography and through a grammar and two or three spellers. You don't need that stuff to make steel, but you need

it. And lately I've been trying to rouse in you a desire to read—to read for pure amusement, for entertainment, and here I find you poring over a confounded book on arithmetic! What did you think of Huckleberry Finn?"

"Great stuff, major!"

"Martin Chuzzlewit?"

"Pretty fair, but too many words."

"Pilgrim's Progress?"

"Punk!"

"I agree with you. Well, you finish *Two Years Before the Mast* and then I'll give you something else. And take that arithmetic back to the office and leave it there! To-morrow evening you can tell me what you found in those fifty pages of Draper's *Intellectual Development of Europe* that I marked out for you. When did you hear from Amy?"

"Yesterday."

"You did, eh? Hand over the letter."

"Not this time."

"What's that? She's getting mushy, eh? When are you going to reply?"

"I've already wrote—written."

"Want me to look it over and herd up the bulls?"

"No, I guess not."

The major glared.

"There's gratitude for you!" he snapped. "Who taught you how to write letters to a lady, how to say the right thing, the catchy thing, the thing that pleases the feminine mind? How to spell, punctuate, paragraph? I did! And now I'm cast off like an old gum boot with a hole in it! There's gratitude! Blow, blow, thou winter wind, thou art not so unkind as a young pup in love!"

He tucked his violin under his chin and began to play. Wally's eyes dropped to the open book that lay on his knees. In a moment he had picked it up and was reading eagerly, oblivious of the sobbing notes of the violin.

As the last strains from the instrument died away he cried out, "Listen here, major! It says that the square on the long side of any right angled triangle—"

The major snorted loudly, leaped to his feet and stamped out of the room.

Wally read for more than an hour, then sat musing in his chair. He reached into his pocket and took out a letter and drew from the envelope a small kodak picture. It was a picture of Amy Creeth. He gazed at it several minutes.

"I wonder if she would," he whispered. "I'm getting on, I'm going ahead down there, and the major says I'm improving in my—my manners. But pshaw! I can't think of such a thing—yet. I'm making no money at all now—less than half what I was making before I went into Mackenzy's department."

Then he read the letter through, and he laughed aloud when he had finished it.

"You'll read no more of her letters, old boy!" he muttered, nodding his head in the direction of the major's room.

He took another letter from his pocket and laid it upon the table, drew up a chair, opened a grammar and a dictionary and began poring over the written lines, from time to time consulting one or other of the two books.

"It is all right," he said when he had worked through it to the last line. "And you'll read no more of my letters to her, major!" And again he nodded his head toward the major's room.

CHAPTER XI

A FILM AND A FIGHT

HE was busy behind a thin partition in the drafting room the next day when he heard Billings on the other side of the partition say: "Look at this, Foster. What do you think of it? Wally Gay's work."

There was a moment's silence, then Foster spoke.

"That boy certainly is there with accurate and neat work. That's a very simple drawing, but the way he has put it up makes it look like something big."

"I'm going to start him on something big to-day and he'll handle it too. Say, Foster, don't you make the break that I did by asking him something about his family or you'll get into trouble as I did. I heard his story the other day. He came to the mills when he was a baby, in a car of pig iron. Nobody knows who—"

Wally dropped the work with which he was occupied and hurried away, returning to his desk. He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Was he always to be overhearing allusions made to his obscure birth? Was he ever to be looked upon as an object of curiosity, laughed at and sneered at, as he was certain he was being laughed at and sneered at now by those who knew his history? Would he all his life be beating down the hot anger that would rise within him, choking back the ugly, wicked words that would fly to his lips because some one must wonder who he was, some one must know who he was, some one must ask who he was? Wretched, miserable, unhappy, he dragged through that day, moving in a cloud of gloom, and his face was sad and his eyes were sorrowful. And the room

left him alone. Then came night and sleep and morning and the wretchedness and misery and unhappiness were gone, and the sadness from his face and the sorrow from his eyes. And by his old-time smile and his old-time laughter and his old-time enthusiasm the room knew that the old-time Wally Gay was on the job again, and the room came to him and slapped him on the back and called him "old scout" and said, "Cast your eagle eye over these figures, old socks, will you, and see if I'm right?" And, "Take a slant at this exercise teacher gave me and tell me if I'm safe in handing it in!" And, "Peep into this nice little nest of numerals and see if there's a cowbird in it, Wally!"

Mackenzy's health, always poor, was failing rapidly. His little body seemed to be shrinking, shriveling; his sunken eyes went farther into the hollows that held them; his bony hands grew bonier, his stooping form stooped more and more. The room quit speaking of him as Rattlebones and spoke respectfully of him as Mackenzy. Then one day he went away and the room said, "It's a long good-by we've said to him." And Bolling took his place—Bolling with the fine knee action; Bolling with the crowbar hidden beneath his coat, lying along the spinal column; Bolling with the perpetual sneer on the thin lips.

Bolling was not liked by the room and Bolling knew he was not liked by the room, yet did he at once proceed to intensify that dislike by demanding stricter discipline during working hours—less talking and laughing, less visiting from desk to desk, closer attention to the work in hand. And then came his order that smoking was to cease. Six draftsmen's pipes were aglow before the order was cold, and putting on their coats and hats and collecting their instruments, six smokers puffed smokily out of the room.

Their unfinished jobs were divided among the other draftsmen, and Wally now found work assigned to him more difficult than any he had before attempted. And

he worked harder, for Bolling did not send him to carry inconsequential messages to Hofer at the new Open Hearth and tell him to spend an hour there looking about. He was bent over his table and drawing-board the entire day now, studying the mysterious white lines of the blue prints, the white lines that were rapidly losing their mystery for him; or busying himself with protractor and scale and rule on new drawings, with Billings frequently glancing over his work, criticizing, approving, offering suggestions.

But on Sundays he would go down to the great new plant that was slowly taking on form and shape, where a semblance of orderliness was rising out of disorderliness, to wander about its foundations and empty spaces, deserted now of workmen, with crane and engine and motor in repose, resting from their Sisyphean labors; to climb down into the holes and pits and excavations and study the heavy masonry, taking the measurement of some wall or arch or pier and checking his finding with the details of the drawing which he had stored away in his mind; to mount to some post of elevation and look along the long line of unfinished furnaces and envision the plant finished, complete and going—the black brimming ladles with the creamy slag slopping over their curving brims, rising silently out of the pits; the squat bowls of red cinder and slag and the glowing molds; the charged furnaces with the yellow flames shooting out of peephole and glory hole and port joint; the vessels of molten pig metal swinging in overhead from the mighty mixers. And as in his mind's eye he beheld the busy scenes to be he fancied he could hear the rumble and jar of the charging cranes; the shriek of the compressed air through the cylinder and outlets as the gas was reversed; the clatter and clash of iron tools thrown about on iron floors; the shouting and laughing, the singing and whistling of the workmen; and steadily, steadily in his ears the bubbling, bubbling, bubbling of the fluid steel in the bath.

"Oh, but it's big work!" he would sigh. "And I'm not in it! I must get back! I must get back!"

He often pondered over his possible return to the Open Hearth. Was Manning to have charge of the new plant? No one seemed to know—Goodlow was silent as to his plans. If Manning was to be superintendent would he, he wondered, give him his old job back if he should ask for it? There would be two foremen here and two assistants. Perhaps—but no, he didn't dare think of a foremanship—not yet.

He did not want to go back to the old Open Hearth. It was a dismal hole, as he saw it now, knowing what the new one was to be. It was old, antiquated, out of date, close and crowded—a man-killer. Why, he would rather be a furnaceman here in the new plant than a foreman in the old—in this splendid plant which he himself had helped create, which he had watched grow and develop from the day the first stake was driven in the soggy clay—that first stake which he had driven with his own hands! Here everything was to be of the latest design. There would be roominess and conveniences and comfort. The furnaces were to be the newest types; they would be larger—there would be big money in one of them. And they would be speedier, too, for all the faults of previous types of furnaces were to be corrected in these. There was the slope—that was the glaring fault in the old furnace—he had studied it all out through his blue glasses when he was a furnaceman. That would be corrected, of course.

Billings was at work on the drawing for the new furnace, the improved type that was to be used in the new plant. He had been at work on it for a long while, and Wally was asking innumerable questions, watching every pencil mark made, poring over the drawing at every opportunity he could find. Every detail of the work he considered—knew every line, every curve, every angle, put away in his memory every dimension, could tell without a moment's hesitation—if asked—the thickness of

every wall, the curvature of every arch, the reach of every angle, the size of every opening.

"Here, Wally," laughed Billings one day, "take the pencil and finish it up. You know as much about it—or more—than I do."

Coming back from his lunch one day the draftsman found Wally bending over the drawing.

"Haven't you been to lunch yet?" he asked.

"No—say, Billings, you haven't drawn the port slope right."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Why, you've made it the same as the slope on the old furnace."

"I know it—I'm copying that part."

"What? But the old furnace is wrong! The port slope is too high!"

"Who said so?"

"I know it! I worked on those furnaces and I know what that port slope does, how it acts. It shoots the flame too much up against the roof and not enough down on the bath."

"Show me what you're talking about," said Billings, bending over the drawing. And he listened carefully as Wally explained his ideas.

"Sounds reasonable enough. I believe you're right, but I'm not a furnaceman—I'm a draftsman and I'm following orders. Why don't you speak to Bolling about it? He'll know."

"I don't believe I'd like to talk to Bolling about it," replied Wally. "Bolling makes me feel cheap. He—no, I won't say anything to him about it. I could talk to Mr. Mackenzy. Why can't you ask Bolling about it?"

Billings smiled.

"All right, I'll speak to him. I'm not terrified by that terrier."

"Nothing doing, Wally," he announced when he came out of Bolling's office. "He says you're all wrong."

"I'm right!" asserted Wally defiantly. And he firmly

believed—he knew he was right. But to prove to himself again that he was right he went into the plant that night and the next, and before the furnace, where he had labored so many long hours—in front of old Number Four—he stood for a long time, stooping and peering in at the peep holes, watching through his blue glasses the course followed by the long sheets of flames of blazing superheated gas as they poured through the port openings.

"Of course! I knew it!" he muttered each time as he turned away from the furnace. "I'll see Bolling myself to-morrow and tell him. It would be a shame to have all those new furnaces built wrong."

Bolling listened to him coldly, with the perpetual sneer curving his thin lips.

"I fail to see just how you get in on this work, Gay," he said when Wally had finished his argument. "I thought you were tracing a drawing for Eckman."

"Then you don't intend to change the slope?"

Bolling's face flushed with anger.

"I certainly do not! And I suggest to you that you get back to your work."

Over his drawing-board Wally pondered and reflected, not a little on the rebuff he had received from Bolling, but more on means for preventing the building of the slopes as he was convinced they should not be built. If he could talk with Manning—but Manning had taken a leave of absence for two weeks and had gone out of the State. He might dare speak to Goodlow but the general manager, he had learned, was out of town. The drawing was nearing completion. Bolling's decision would be final. Anyway the point must have been discussed and rediscussed by Mackenzy and Manning and Goodlow—perhaps it would have done no good if he could have seen Manning or Goodlow.

"What did his nibs say?" asked Billings as he came over to Wally's desk.

"He said he wouldn't change it."

"Oh, well, I shouldn't lose any sleep over it if I were you! Let the big boys do the worrying over things like that. Why should we?"

"Yes, that's all right maybe, but I expect—or I hope to have a job in that new Open Hearth some day and I want to see the furnaces built right."

"What's that? You're not going to leave here and go back to the mills?"

"Yes, I've got to get back to work."

"Isn't this work?"

"Not my kind."

"Wally, you're foolish, I say, if you quit here. Why, man, this is right in your line! You fairly eat this kind of work! There's no limit to your chances here!"

"That's big work out there, Billings—bigger than this. I want to make steel."

"But the long hours, the hard labor——"

"My muscles ache to be doing something."

"The class of men with whom you have to work——"

"I'm of their class, I guess."

Billings threw up his hands and turned away shaking his head.

"You puzzle me, Wally," he said. "I can't understand you."

The drawing of the furnace was completed that day, and Billings and Bolling spent the two following days going over it, making certain no error had crept in. Then Wally heard Bolling say to Foster, "You may start tracing AZ-2435 to-morrow morning, Foster. And push it right along—I want to get the blue print out to Ross as soon as possible. He's been calling for it already."

That evening as Wally left the office he saw the drawing lying on Foster's desk. He bent over it for a moment.

"It's wrong!" he muttered. "And it's going through! It's a shame!"

Major Fronk found him strangely uncommunicative that evening. His replies to the major's questions were

halting and incoherent. He sat staring at the floor at his feet, showing no interest in any of the many themes his companion introduced, until the major snorted and stamped out of the room. His bedtime hour struck but he did not move. Another hour struck, and then he put on his hat and went out into the street and walked rapidly away in the direction of the mills.

He pounded at the basement door of the great office building until he had roused the janitor, to whom he explained that he had some work to do in the drafting room. Grumbling, the old man admitted him, and he hurried upstairs to the engineering department's office.

A single dim light was burning in the drafting room. He pulled down all the window shades, went to Foster's desk and switched on a cluster of powerful lights. Then with eraser and pencil and rule he set to work on the drawing that lay spread out on the desk. Painstakingly he labored for a half hour or more and for a like length of time he sat looking at the drawing after he had laid down his pencil. Then he rose, turned off the lights, raised the blinds and left the building.

He returned at once to the Grand House and went to bed, but he did not fall asleep—he was too excited to sleep. And doubts, too, had already begun to rise in his mind. Would the slight changes he had made in the drawing be discovered? Probably not—Bolling was in a hurry to get the print out to Ross, the boss mason. But had he done right? It was for the best—he was certain of that, yet there was something wrong about it—that feeling persisted, grew stronger. Why, it was both right and wrong! But results—ah, results would justify his act! So he lay staring at the black ceiling above him, tormented by doubts and questions until daylight came.

That morning Bolling sent him out to assist Hofer, whose man had gone away for a few days. Hofer found him unusually quiet. He performed his work without any show of interest or enthusiasm for it. The

changed drawing preoccupied his mind and he was growing more and more uneasy and disturbed over his act. Should he go to Bolling and tell him what he had done and let him restore the drawing to its original state before the print had been given to the boss mason? Deep in his heart he felt that he should do that, but equally deep in his heart lay the conviction that it was best the drawing should stand as he had altered it. And again he whispered to himself that while he had done something wrong, yet at the same time he had done something that was right. Let the thing go through!

Hofer's man returned and Wally went back to the drafting room. And that same afternoon he saw Jimmy Sloan carrying an armful of newly printed blue prints into Bolling's office. He knew they were copies of drawing AZ-2435. He laid down his pencil and got down from his stool. He would go in and tell Bolling! Ah, Bolling's sneer, his cutting voice, his biting words—he could see the sneer, he could hear the voice and inwardly he writhed under the cutting words yet to be uttered. Oh, if Mackenzy were only in there!

And as he stood there at his desk, the conflict raging hot within him, with the impulse to go battling fiercely against the impulse to stay, Bolling came out of his office with one of the prints in his hand and turned toward his desk. Wally gasped. Had he discovered the alteration?

"Where's Jimmy, Gay?" asked Bolling. "Find him and tell him to get a messenger to rush this print out to Ross."

And he tossed the blue print upon Wally's desk.

Wally found Jimmy in the filing room, gave him Bolling's message and returned to his desk. The crisp new paper had unrolled itself and the sketch of the furnace lay before his eyes. He looked at it. The changes he had made that night had carried through—they had not been noticed. There were his figures and lines just as he had written and drawn them. But no—these were not his lines! His lines had been black, these were

white! And he seemed to hear a voice repeating to him the thought that was in his brain, "Yes, your lines were black, very black! These are white lines—the sun drew them!" He hastily rolled up the print, slipped a rubber band about it and carried it to Jimmy's desk. A half hour before quitting time Jimmy came to him.

"Say, Wally, will you give me a hand? I want to move a case of records."

"Yes, I'll go," replied Wally, and he followed the boy into the filing room.

"Say, I seen a humdinger of a fillum at the Bi-jow Theater last night," began Jimmy as they were working the heavy case across the floor. "It was called The Cast-off. Say, you ought to go and see that fillum, Wally. It's a steel-mill fillum. It's about a baby kid that come to the mills in a car of pig iron, and a foreman takes him to raise and he grows up about the mills and does all kinds of work—roustabout, you know, and he _____"

His rattle of words ceased suddenly, for Wally's hand had shot out and was clutching the boy's arm.

"Are you trying to get funny with me?" he demanded in a voice shaking with anger.

"Ouch! Le' go my arm, Wally! Le' go!" cried Jimmy.

"Who told you to say all that to me? Who told you?"

"Le' go, Wally! Nobody did! I seen it—I seen it at the Bi-jow! Honest! Le' go!"

Wally loosened his grip on the boy's arm and hurriedly left the room. The clock on the wall near the door of Bolling's office showed it was yet fifteen minutes until quitting time, but he did not wait—he seized his coat and hat and rushed out.

Jimmy Sloan went to Billings, rubbing an aching arm, and told him Wally Gay had gone crazy. And Billings informed Jimmy that Wally Gay, crazy, would have more sense than some sane office boys he had known. And he asked the young man, why, for heaven's sake, he didn't buy a razor and start shaving.

Major Fronk, with a broad smile wrinkling his lean face, intercepted Wally in the hallway of the hotel and began a story which he had been wanting to tell all day, but the smile disappeared from the old face as he was brushed aside and Wally hurried on and into his room, slamming the door behind him.

"Something wrong! Something rotten wrong!" muttered the major, and shaking his head, he went downstairs to mope about the office and barroom.

In his room Wally threw himself face down upon his bed and lay there very quiet an hour, two hours. Then he rose, left the room and the hotel and took a street car that brought him to the heart of the big city. There he sought out the Bijou Theater, purchased a ticket and went in. The house was almost filled and the usher conducted him to a chair near the front. The show began just as he was taking his seat.

The title of the play was flashed on the screen and he read it—The Cast-Off. Then the name of the author—Harold Bridges, a name that meant nothing to him. He did not associate it with a man named Bridges whom he had sometimes seen in the mills—Goodlow's secretary, he had been told. Some other names were thrown on the screen, but he did not read them. Then pictures.

He saw a gang of foreign laborers unloading cars of pig iron. One of them opened the door of a box car, climbed into it and in a moment came out carrying a rough wooden box in which lay a baby. He saw the foreman of the gang, an old man, bend over the box with the laborers crowding about him, and he saw the old man push them back, pick up the box, put it under his arm and walk away.

He saw a dirty, ragged little boy playing about a dirty, tumble-down hovel in a dirty, wretched alley; saw him fighting with other dirty and ragged children; saw him filching fruit from hucksters' carts, stealing coal from freight cars, tipping beer kegs at the rear of saloons.

He saw this boy, grown older, selling papers on the streets, carrying pails of water in the yards of the steel mills, pulling pit covers, raising furnace doors, running tests. And he watched the boy growing up about the steel mills, employed in various capacities, imposed on by older boys, jeered at by gangs of men, worked like a slave at hard, dirty, ugly tasks, until he saw him, a young man, laboring in a dark, dripping tunnel underground with shovel and wheelbarrow.

Then he saw the young man climb into a box car and lie down and fall asleep, and men came and shut and locked the doors of the car, and a locomotive puffed in and hauled the car away. He saw the man in the car trying to force his way out, fighting for his life, falling down on the rough steel which the car contained, in collapse.

And so he sat and watched the pictures on the screen with eyes so intensely fixed on them that his eyeballs pained him, with his temples throbbing, with his heart pounding, with his hands gripping so tightly the arms of the chair in which he sat that his muscles hurt—watched the revealing of his own life's history, with the pictures at times following faithfully the facts of that history, at times running at ridiculous variance with them.

And he saw the boy—grown man now—come to his position as a furnaceman; saw him standing before the huge furnace, peering into its white depths; saw a flood of steel cascading from the furnace into the black ladle; saw the ladle swing up out of the pit, its brim laved by the slopping slag.

Then he beheld the girl—that would be Amy, Amy Creeth—come into the Open Hearth building, one of a crowd of sightseers; saw her watching the man at work in front of the furnace, not recognizing him, not knowing who he was; saw a great crane rushing down upon her; saw her start to run, only to stumble and fall di-

rectly in the path of the oncoming crane. And the man at the furnace rushed forward, leaped in front of the crane, picked her up and bore her away in his arms.

Another scene, and the two were together. He saw them in each other's arms, saw them plight their troth.

Then came the other man, the man who had been following the girl, wanting her—came to her and whispered to her, and suddenly before his staring eyes appeared on the screen the words :

“HAS HE TOLD YOU WHO HE IS?
HAS HE TOLD YOU HE IS A CAST-OFF,
A—”

He saw no more. With a choking sound in his throat he leaped to his feet and stepped into the aisle. A loose chair stood near the front row of seats. He seized it and with all his strength—strength intensified by the passion of the moment—he hurled it at the lurid lines before him. The chair struck the screen and rattled to the floor of the stage.

There was an uproar throughout the house—shouts and murmurs and shuffling of feet and the noise of seats thrown up as people rose to their feet to see what had happened. Down the aisle he strode, his eyes glaring, his hands clenching and unclenching. A house policeman ran forward to stop him and received a shove that sent him staggering backward, and Wally rushed on and through the swinging doors.

Harold Bridges, the author of *The Cast-off*, was sitting in the rear of the house.

“By George, it’s the wop himself!” he exclaimed as Wally passed near him. “Perhaps it is just as well that I am no longer out there at the mills!”

Out in the open air Wally hurried along the street, bareheaded, blind to his surroundings, sick at heart, miserable of soul. The red hand of anger that had gripped

him while he sat watching the moving pictures of his life, had loosened its clutch as those lurid lines had leaped before his eyes on the screen—"Has he told you who he is? Has he told you he is a cast-off?"—and in its stead black despair had seized him. For in that little moment there had struck through him the realization that he had not told Amy Creeth—he had not told her he was a cast-off, that he did not know who he was! He had not told her, yet had he dared to think of her, dared to whisper to himself that some day he would ask her to be his wife!

He strode on, seeing nothing but those lurid words that moved before him as he moved, flickering in front of his eyes as they had flickered before them on the screen—"Has he told you who he is? Has he told you he is a cast-off?"

Why hadn't he told her? Why hadn't he told her in one of the many letters he had written to her in the past year and more? If he told her now would she not at once ask: "Why did you not tell me at first?"

Oh, the misery, the bitterness, the wretchedness of it all!

"Why tell her at all until—"

He stopped short. Had some one spoken? It was that same voice that had whispered, "Yes, your lines were black, very black! These are white lines—the sun drew them!"

He threw out his arm as though to thrust back the whisperer. A hand seized his arm and jerked it down.

"Say, what's the matter with you? Are you crazy?" demanded a harsh voice.

The flickering words disappeared, his vision returned to him and he saw a policeman standing at his side, gazing curiously at him.

"No, I'm not crazy," he replied quietly—"nor drunk. I have just been looking at a moving picture that worked me up a bit. I want to go to Steelburg—I live there, I work there."

"Well, yonder's your car line on that street. Where's your hat?"

"I left it in the theater, I suppose. Maybe I could buy this man's hat for a dollar."

Wally turned to a street loafer who had sidled up to hear the talk.

"Perduce the plank," said the grinning loafer, and Wally exchanged a dollar for a sadly battered old hat. He hurried to the other street and caught a car.

In his room at the Grand House he set to packing his trunk and valise in furious haste. To get away from Steelburg, away from everybody who knew him, was the thought holding and controlling him now. He would go where nobody knew him, where there would be no one to laugh at him, look curiously at him, ask him questions. To get away! All his life he had seen people looking at him, whispering as he passed, and he knew why they looked and why they whispered. And now somebody had given his story to the theater and he was to be held up to further scorn and ridicule! To get away! He must go far and hide himself, for he could not tell Amy Creeth who he was.

To get away! To-morrow at the mills they would know of his alteration of the drawing, for as he had traveled on the car back to Steelburg there had flashed upon his mind the awful foolishness, the utter ridiculousness, the insanity of his act. Hoping the change would not be noticed! Why, Ross, the boss mason, had built and rebuilt the furnaces of Steelburg Mills for years; he knew them—knew them to the minutest detail; he knew what the new furnace was to be—he had talked it over with Manning and Mackenzy and Goodlow; he knew the port slope of the old furnace was to be copied for the new furnace. Already he had uncovered the error—a half hour after the messenger had handed him the print, no doubt. To-morrow Bolling would accuse Wally—for whom else could he accuse? And the draft-

ing room would laugh and the mills would hear of it and laugh, all Steelburg would laugh and Bolling would kick him out! To get away!

A few things only went into the valise. The rest of his belongings were thrown without semblance of order into the trunk, the lid of which he forced down and locked. The books the major had given him to read he piled together on a table. From beneath the floor rug he took a roll of bills. Then he picked up his valise and went out.

Before the door of the major's room he stopped. Should he waken him and bid him good-by? He wanted to. Poor old fellow! But there would be questions. Let him sleep. He would write him a letter and tell him everything.

He paid his bill at the desk, asked the clerk to have his trunk stored for him and hurried out and took a street car that brought him to a railway station.

In Chicago he spent two wretched, miserable days in a cheap hotel, trying to decide as to his next step, all the while buried in the depths of despair. Once he went into a saloon and ordered a glass of whisky. The odor of the liquor as he raised the glass to his lips brought up memories of The Morgue and The Bucket of Blood in Vinegar Gully, and he shuddered. He set down the glass untasted and went out. He would not begin that again!

Sometimes there would flash before his eyes those lurid words he had seen on the screen—"Has he told you who he is?" He would never tell Amy Creeth who he was! What would she—what could she have to do with him if she knew?

He remembered Ed Hannis. Some one had told him a few months before of having met Ed Hannis in the mills where he was working in Indiana. He recalled the name of the city. On inquiring he found the place was not a great distance from Chicago. He decided he would

go out and hunt up Ed. If he could get a job in the mills where Hannis was employed he might go to work there.

Ed Hannis chuckled when Wally told him his mission.

"I thought you'd get enough of Steelburg some time or other. Zowie, but it's a rotten old hole! A job? Easy! An Open Hearth man can grab off a job any old place where they make steel. I'll introduce you to one of the foremen—he lives at this hotel."

Wally was told by the foreman he could report for work the following morning, and he went to bed at an early hour, only to lie awake and wonder if this were the thing he should have done. Toward midnight he rose and dressed himself and sat down at a window, to stare at the red glare of a dozen great blast furnaces a half mile distant. It wouldn't do! Hannis knew his story and Hannis would tell that story sooner or later. Hannis would talk. It wouldn't do!

Dawn was breaking and the red glare above the blast furnaces was beginning to grow dim when he left his room with his final decision made. He went to the hotel office and inquired about trains and in an hour's time was in Chicago. His stay there was short. Before noon he was on a train speeding westward.

Amy Creeth laid down the pencil she was using in correcting her pupils' written work, which she had taken home with her, and went to answer a knock at the door.

"Wally!" she cried.

The man before her said nothing, but he reached out his hand and took hers, dropping it quickly. His face was drawn and haggard; there was no luster in his eyes; his lips were without a smile. He stepped into the room and dropped wearily into a chair.

"Wally!" she again exclaimed. "Is it—is it you?"

"Yes, I—I am—" he stammered and stopped.

She was looking at him with her lips parted, with her

hands closing and unclosing. Then she fell to trembling and she moved to a chair and sat down.

"Amy, I'm running away." His voice was not the voice she had once known in him. "I'm running away," he repeated.

"Running away? From Steelburg?" she asked, laughing nervously.

"Yes, and from—from—"

"Well, you didn't run away from me, did you? You ran straight to me!"

Again she laughed nervously.

Not a shadow of a smile did he have for her sally.

"Yes, I am running away from you, but I had to—I had—"

"Tell me what it is, Wally!" she burst out. "Tell me!"

And he told her, told her the bitterest truths it seemed to him—oh, he knew it—that ever man had to tell the woman he loved; told her with bloodless lips that quivered, in a voice that broke and struggled painfully on, and his eyes looked not at her as he told her.

And from that awful moment in the playhouse he went back—for he now felt the urge to tell her everything—and told her of his misdeed in the drafting room. He told her, too, of that ghostly voice that had whispered to him of the lines—the black lines and the white lines.

"Some day"—he was nearing the end of the telling—"I intended to ask you—maybe I let you know in some of my letters that I intended to ask you—and I ought not to have done so, but now I shall never ask you. And so—I am running away—from you."

He raised his eyes to hers and smiled the queer little smile that had made his teachers love him when he was a young rascal in Sycamore School, the little smile that had helped to make her love him, as now it helped to quicken the love for him that was great in her heart.

She rose and went to him and sat down on the arm

of his chair, put her arms about his neck, drew his head to her, laid her cheek against his and let it rest there—let it rest there until she had controlled the tears that gathered to her heart, that rose up into her throat and choked her, that welled from her eyes, dimming them until she could not see even the mass of wavy dark-brown hair very close to them. Then she pushed back his head and kissed him on the lips.

"There!" she said, rising and standing before him. "You say you don't know who you are! I know! I know who you are! You are Wellington Gay! I don't want to know any more than that!"

"And now listen to me, Wellington Gay! You are running away, but you are going to do some running back! You are going to run right back to Steelburg and you are going to run into that horrid Bolling's office and tell him how you changed his old drawing! He will discharge you—I know he will! You ought to be discharged! And then you are going to run to that nice Mr. Manning you have written me so much about and tell him what you did and ask him for another chance. I know he will give you another chance. You are going back to Steelburg, Wally, and do all this, aren't you? And you're going to try to forget completely the other foolishness that has been worrying you, aren't you?"

"Yes!" he cried, springing up. The luster was back in his eyes, there was a flush on his cheeks and the old-time smile played about his sensitive lips. "Yes, I'm going back!"

He seized his hat and started toward the door.

"Wait a minute, Wally!" she cried. "It isn't train time yet! Sit down. Why, I want to have a little talk with you!"

And she sat down on a sofa and with a little gesture indicated that there was room there for two.

CHAPTER XII

THE SLOPE ASCENDANT

WHEN Wally entered the chief engineer's office he started in surprise—Mackenzy, not Bolling, sat at the big desk.

"Ah, Wally!" said Mackenzy, reaching out a bony hand. "We were about ready to put the detectives on your trail. Where have you been?"

"I went away—I have come back. I expected to find Mr. Bolling here."

"Bolling was called to the bedside of a seriously ill child and I had to return to look after the work. I shouldn't be here—I am sick, sick!"

Mackenzy was drooping in his chair.

"I came to tell Bolling, but I'll tell you. I altered one of the drawings for the new plant before it was traced and printed."

Wally spoke very quietly.

Mackenzy straightened up quickly and his hands went to the handles of his chair.

"You did what?" he asked sharply.

"I altered a drawing—I changed the angle of the port slope on the new furnace we are—you are building."

The chief engineer stared at him as though uncertain whether he had heard aright.

"Tell me about it!" he said shortly.

Wally told him.

"Step into the other room and tell Jimmy to bring me the print."

The print came and Mackenzy spread the big sheet of

white-lined blue paper on his table that stood near his desk and bent over it.

"Show me the change you made."

With a pencil Wally quickly pointed out the changes he had made in the drawing and then he began arguing for his theory, forgetting that he had come there only to make a confession of guilt. He talked as he had never talked before to any one, pleading for the adoption of his plan, begging for a trial of it on one of the new furnaces at least, checking now and then the rapid rush of words that tumbled from his lips to make a hasty sketch illustrating some point of his argument. And he ended abruptly with the question, "Now don't you believe I'm right, Mr. Mackenzy?"

Mackenzy had not interrupted him once while he talked and he asked no question now. He leaned back in his chair and began rocking to and fro, with his thin bony fingers lacing and unlacing themselves. Finally he spoke.

"I am afraid I shall have to let you go for this."

"Yes, sir—I expected it," returned Wally.

"That you should have done a thing like this surprises me—pains me more than I can say. You did wrong."

"I know it—I knew it then, but if you had been here
_____"

Mackenzy interrupted.

"Why did you go away? Because of this?"

"No—that is, not exactly, though I suppose it had something to do with it, too, for I didn't have a moment's peace after I had tampered with the drawing. Something else happened about the same time that upset me and I—well, I just funk—I went to pieces."

"Well, it is not too late to catch the error. Anyway, I think Ross would have discovered it—no doubt he has already. I shall tell Bottman to pay you off. If you wish to apply to the company for work in some other capacity I shall not stand in your way. Good-by."

After Wally had left his office Mackenzy returned to the blue print and pored over it for a half hour. Then

he struck it a blow with his open hand, reached for his telephone and called the general manager's office.

Manning was not back from his trip, and for three days Wally sat about the hotel where he lived, reading the books the major gave him, getting out what his instructor termed "his lessons," listening to the old man's tirades. He had told his companion that he had been discharged from Mackenzy's department for cause and that he might go back to work in the Open Hearth, but he did not dwell on the subject, and the major sensing that the young man was passing through a crisis, asked him no questions.

He found Manning in his office one morning and hurriedly told him what had happened. Manning heard him through without comment or question and without any sign of surprise or interest.

"All I can do now," he said, when Wally had finished, "is to give you a furnace, and it won't be a very good furnace either—Number Eight. Do you want it?"

"Yes, I'll take it!" replied Wally eagerly.

"All right! Come out to-night."

So he went back to work on the iron floor before the white-hot furnace, and the fierce heat pouring through the peepholes in the doors, through which he was constantly peering, burnt his face to a fiery red, and the skin on his nose peeled and rolled up into little rolls like tiny bits of tissue paper, and there were blisters on his legs beneath the thin overalls he wore, and on his breast where his shirt fell open there was branded a great red wedge. And because of their long period of inactivity his muscles had lost their hardness and the new work hurt them, and sometimes after a severe spell of labor on the furnace, when he had gone outside the building and sat down to rest, with the cold wind blowing on him, his sinews seemed to set and become rigid, and when he would move again he fancied he could hear them crack.

An old, antiquated type of furnace was Number Eight,

the lowest in tonnage, the slowest in running time, the hardest to work of the whole group. He could make no time on it; his tonnage record on the daily production sheet was the worst of all, yet he worked harder than any other furnaceman on the floor. No workman wanted anything to do with Number Eight. Helpers assigned to it quickly asked for a transfer, and not getting it, would quit. It was the dread and terror of every Open Hearth man who knew it. But never a moment did he shirk his work.

From the square hole in the side of the building, out of which he would a hundred times a day thrust his head seeking fresh air, he could look across the yards and see the great new plant. It was coming on, coming on rapidly. The fourteen stacks, two hundred feet tall, were climbing upward—some of them were finished and he could see men swinging at ropes' ends along their sides, painting them black, smearing them over until they glistened in the sunlight. He watched a gang of men walking about over the gray roof of the long double-decked building covering it with red paint. He could see new cranes racing up and down their new runways over the new stockyards, and where Hofer's shanty had stood he saw a railway track being laid down. And he knew work was going ahead inside the huge building. The fourteen furnaces were being brought to completion—some of them were finished, he had heard—the roofs on, the ports built, the checker chambers filled, the flues sealed, everything in readiness for making first bottom.

When he was on night shift he would see great shafts of light shooting up from the new building and he would hear the sound of laboring engines and motors and the rat-tat-tat of pneumatic hammers and the banging of sledge on chisel and the shouting of men, for now they were working night and day, rushing the plant to completion. And he would turn away from the window with a sigh and go to peer into the dazzling depths of

his old worn-out furnace, wishing he could go and walk through that great plant that he had helped to create. And there were moments when the desire became so keen that he suffered positive pain.

One Sunday after his return to the floor he had entered the yards and gone to the new plant, but he found a "No Admission" sign over the gate and the watchman there had denied him entrance and he knew then that he would not be allowed to follow through to its completion the big work which he had helped to start, which he had watched getting under way, which he had thought about and dreamed about for so many days and weeks and months.

There were days when Number Eight furnace became almost unmanageable and he would feel tempted to throw down his tools and quit—when the bath went cold and he must pig it for hours to restore its lost carbon; or, contrariwise, when the charge melted hard and he must heave in box after box of heavy lumps of red ore to absorb the excess carbon; when the checkers choked and the gas would not flow; when his helper proved worthless and he must do two men's work—days when he would creep from the mills to his room and there drop down in physical collapse, too tired to talk, too tired to give ear to the major's chatter, too tired to listen to his music. Then would the old man curse him lovingly and call him kindly, harsh names and tucking his violin under his arm he would go to his own room, where he would stand very close to the wall that separated them and play the tunes he knew Wally loved to hear—The Serenade and There is a Green Hill Far Away.

One day as he stood looking out of the square hole in the side of the building he saw a wisp of black smoke float out of the cavernous top of one of the towering stacks—there were fourteen of them finished now and glistening in the sunlight. Then from another and another and another black smoke rolled out.

"They're lighting them up!" he muttered. "They're touching off the oil-soaked wood! Lighting them up! And I'm not there to see it, not there to help!"

And life was gray and unbearably dull for him all that day and the next and the next as he stood at the square hole watching the smoke, now blue, curling up out of the fourteen stacks.

New faces now began to appear along the floor where he worked. Men he did not know stood before the furnaces and threw pig iron and ore and limestone and spar and dolomite into them, and reversed the gas and took tests and broke and examined the fractures, for the old men had gone to the new plant, to better jobs, and outsiders had come in to fill their places. And he had not been shifted from Number Eight!

He thought about this as he stood before his gas valves. Why hadn't he been given a better furnace? Why had outsiders been favored?

"Paying up!" he whispered. And he reversed the gas and went to peer into his furnace.

One night he caught the flare of yellow flames in a dozen places about the big building across the yards. The blue smoke no longer rolled from the tall stacks.

"They've turned on the gas," he told himself.

And he knew that in a few days as the furnaces grew hotter and hotter they would begin making new bottom—scattering the crushed magnesite over the thick magnesitic brick flooring of the huge steel pans and waiting until the heat had set it in a solid mass; scattering another layer and fusing that and then another, building up the bottom little by little and layer by layer until it was thick enough to withstand the cutting and gashing and gnawing of the seething lakes of steel that were soon to bubble and roll and tumble about over their surfaces. He wanted to be there to see the work done, to help do it. And he wondered if the gas producers were working with precision and if the new feeding device for the stokers, which Mackenzy had worked out

and which he himself had drafted, was proving satisfactory. And the checker chambers! If he could only slip over there and pull a loose brick out of some bulk-head and gaze into the glowing depths of the long gas-choked chamber! He had helped build those chambers—helped Hofer lay out their lines, driven stakes for the excavations, checked their dimensions, helped Foster with the drawings, traced the drawings!

Late one afternoon, as he stood looking out of the square hole he saw gray-blue smoke coming from four of the stacks.

"They are charging!" He said the word aloud and something hurt him in the throat as he spoke them. "They are charging! They'll tap steel to-night perhaps—early to-morrow morning sure!"

Coming into the yards next morning he stopped a half dozen workmen going off night shift and asked them if steel had been tapped at the new plant. None could tell him—none seemed interested. Then he met a roundsman and put his question to him. No, they had not tapped—they wouldn't tap until about nine o'clock, the roundsman told him.

He found a cold dead heat in Number Eight, with the night furnaceman raging and swearing, declaring the furnace was hoodooed and asserting that he was through, that he would never work another turn on the furnace.

He set to work with his helper, pigging the cold heat. They pigged steadily for an hour with no results. Then his helper quit—he wasn't going to kill himself, he said. Another helper was sent to the furnace, but the man was half drunk and of no worth whatever, and for another hour Wally worked the obstreperous heat alone, heaving and tugging and lifting until he was bathed in perspiration and weak from weariness. Then the floor foreman came and told him Manning had sent for him.

"He wants to see you over at the new dump," he said. "This man will watch your furnace until you get back." "It'll need something more than watching," laughed

Wally as he started away. "Feed it pig! Feed it pig! I'll never get that heat out when I come back if you don't."

With his clothing black in spots where the perspiration from his body had soaked through it; with his hands covered with the dirt and dust picked up from the iron he had been handling; with his face smudged with grime and criss-crossed with crooked rivulets of dirty sweat; with his blue glasses pushed up over the top of his ragged cloth cap, Wally crossed the yards and climbed the iron stairs to the floor of the new Open Hearth.

His eyes glistened, his nerves tingled and there was a sharp intake of his breath as he looked at the scene before him—the long line of furnaces, all charged and aglow; the broad and roomy floor, smooth and clean; the heavy electric charging machines rolling along their runways; and the old gang at work before the furnaces, shoveling, barring, breaking tests, heaving in ore and pig, slamming their iron tools down upon the iron floor, yelling and talking and laughing as they labored—the same tough, noisy, good-natured, grouchy gang.

Over the pit he saw the new pouring cranes waiting, waiting for something to do—waiting to perform their first work. They were black and greasy as they had left the shops, and they were very huge and powerful. In their cabs sat the cranemen, waiting for something to do. And down in the pit that was now free of the débris of slag and scrap and broken molds and brick and bent bars and wrecked buggies that would soon clutter it he saw the steel pourers and their helpers and the mold men and the cappers and the shovelmen, standing about in idle groups waiting for something to do.

On the floor, as his eyes came back to it, he saw a group of men not in workmen's clothes, and they, too, were waiting—waiting to see that first heat of steel tapped. He passed quite near to them, but none of them looked at him—he was just a floorman, the dirtiest work-

man of them all. He saw General Manager Goodlow and some others whom he knew to be higher than Goodlow. He saw Mackenzy and Bolling. Billings was there, and Foster and a half dozen others from the drafting room who had worked to make all this possible. He saw Ackerman and McNutt and Jaster and Calla, and he noticed a shipping clerk whom he knew, talking earnestly with one of the floormen.

He saw Manning coming toward him.

"Hello!" was the superintendent's greeting. "I thought maybe you'd like to look things over here while they are new. Take a glance at the furnace there."

Wally walked to the furnace in front of them, dropped his blue glasses over his eyes and stooped to peer in at the peepholes. He studied the bubbling white bath for a moment, then looked at the roof, then turned to watch the inrushing flames at the port's opening. He started and gave a murmur of surprise.

That was his slope! That was his idea, the one he had set down on the drawing which he had tampered with! The great wave of flame was pouring down upon the bath, curving and twisting and playing over its agitated surface, and the roof above was as smooth and as white and as unmarred as is a frost-covered sidewalk of brick on a winter's morning before men step upon it. They had adopted his idea for this furnace!

He turned and looked at Manning quizzically. Manning smiled and pointed to the next furnace. Wally went to it and looked in. There again he saw his idea had been followed.

"They're all alike, Wally," said Manning, coming to join him. "Mackenzy agreed with you after he had studied your idea, though he did not tell you, and he convinced the rest of us. There isn't a bit of doubt that the thing will prove up in great shape. Now come down here—I've something else to show you."

They went to the farther end of the long floor.

"This is my new office," said Manning, opening the door of a small building and stepping inside. "What do you think of it?"

"Nifty enough," replied Wally, looking about him.

"I think so too. In here," and Manning went to a door opening out of the room in which they stood, "is your office."

"My—my what?" stammered Wally.

"Your office. Goodlow decided that I should have charge of both Open Hearths and I've got to have an assistant—a good one. You're to be that assistant."

Wally fell to trembling in every fiber of his body and his voice was unsteady as he spoke.

"But—I—I—no, no—"

"Go in and see if it suits you," said Manning, pushing him through the doorway. "If you find that anything is missing let me know and I'll order it. I've got to go down now to Number Six. When you're through looking round come down there—I want you to take out the first heat of steel."

Wally shut the door behind him. The little room in which he stood was very new and very clean and there was a sharp odor of fresh paint and varnish. He saw a shiny new desk and a shiny new table—between them a shiny new chair. He dropped down into the chair, still trembling. There were pens and pencils and blocks of paper on the desk and on its top stood a row of new leather-bound books. He wheeled his chair about. On the table lay a stack of blue prints. A glance told him the topmost one was the drawing of the furnace—the drawing he had altered. He dropped his arms upon the myriad white lines that covered the big blue sheet, buried his face in them and cried.

CHAPTER XIII

HOT METAL

THE Stanley Kirk Furnace Company owned and operated four blast furnaces at Ferro Junction. Ferro Junction was situated a little less than ten miles south of Steelburg. In size it was a place of no great importance, but its shipping facilities, both rail and water, were excellent and an enormous volume of freight flowed through its narrow confines every year. Besides the four blast furnaces, extensive railroad yards and shops were located there, and a number of warehouses. Connecting the Junction with Steelburg was a single-track stub line infrequently used and then for freight hauling only.

As an iron-producing center Ferro Junction was older than Steelburg, for while Steelburg was yet a little farmers' town, long before it had given up its first name of St. Clair, dropped its countrified habits and turned its attention to things in iron and steel, there were two charcoal furnaces in operation at the Junction, drawing their fuel from the surrounding forests, working the near-by hills for their lean ore, finding their limestone in shallow quarries close at hand. But the forests were quickly burned up, the deposits of lean ore exhausted and then the charcoal furnaces disappeared. In their places rose up two huge furnaces—or so they were considered then—with capacities each of one hundred and fifty tons of iron a day, burning coke for fuel and smelting the new rich red ore that was flowing down from the Superior regions. But these two furnaces were in no great while outclassed and were replaced by larger

furnaces and these in their turn by still larger—stacks of five hundred tons' capacity.

Old Kent Masterson had built and operated the two charcoal furnaces at Ferro Junction, and they had made him wealthy. Kent Masterson, Jr., had built and operated the first two coke-burning stacks. Dunwood Masterson had built and in a half-hearted way for a while operated the second couple of these furnaces. But Stanley Kirk had erected the four great modern stacks that stood at Ferro Junction, casting their two thousand tons of iron every twenty-four hours, when Steelburg Mills began worrying about hot metal for its Open Hearth. And Stanley Kirk owned and operated them.

Stanley Kirk owned and operated the Ferro Junction group of furnaces because Dunwood Masterson had not taken kindly to the profession of his grandfather, old Kent Masterson, had shown no interest in the great business he had inherited from his father, had not cared to continue in that business. Shortly after coming into possession of his estate he had made Stanley Kirk, his furnace superintendent, a partner in his business, giving him such unheard-of opportunities that within a few years Stanley Kirk was able to buy out his former employer.

This was what Dunwood Masterson wished—he did not like business, and anyway he had money enough—he was several times a millionaire. So he turned over his holdings to Stanley Kirk, left the Junction, where the Mastersons had always lived, and moved to the great city of which Steelburg was a corporate part, and there entered politics. In a few years he was elected representative to Congress from one of the big city's districts and he gave his constituents such satisfaction that they continued to return him term after term. Then he stood for the United States Senate and was elected, and he was serving the fourth year of his first term when Steelburg Mills began worrying about hot metal for its Open Hearth. And there was talk of Dunwood Masterson's

being a possible dark-horse candidate for his party in the next presidential campaign.

When Steelburg Mills built fourteen new Open Hearth furnaces and installed two five-hundred-ton mixers to handle the hot metal that was to be used in the new furnaces, somebody had blundered—Steelburg Mills could not find hot metal enough to keep the new plant running full.

"Somebody," as a shipping clerk remarked to Denny Costigan, a foundry foreman, as he sat down on the foreman's desk to discuss the recent closing down of half the new plant for want of iron, "somebody must have had poppy-seed salad for breakfast, dinner and supper when that new Open Hearth was being planned and built."

Denny Costigan sighed and drew a paper package from his pocket.

"There it is before you ask for it," he said, tossing the package upon the table .

"What d'ye know about it, Denny?" chortled the shipping clerk as he started to explore the interior of the package with his fingers. "It's a great old member of the vegetable kingdom, isn't it? I hear there's a movement under way among the smokers of the world to build a monument to Sir Walter Raleigh. Me—I'm saving up my dimes to donate to a fund to erect a memorial to the knightly gent who discovered the weed was good for mastication.

"But as I said before, Denny, what d'ye know about it? Here's seven of the new furnaces idle because they haven't got iron. Who fell down? Was it Chief Engineer Rattlebones? Was it Manning? Was it Goodlow? If dinky dubs like you and me, Denny, made the bulls the big guys make it'd be tramp, tramp, tramp the boys are marching—for us. But as the old, old saying has it—'The king can do no wrong.' Isn't it so?

"Here they go and build a great big Open Hearth, expecting to use hot metal in it, but they don't increase their blast-furnace capacity, supposing they had blast

furnaces enough. Which they have while all those blast furnaces are running full, but when some of them have to be blown out and shut down for relining—and that will happen, Denny—then—presto! And also—zip! Where's your hot metal then? Right now there's Katy, Susie and Emma with their insides ripped out, with no chance of their being able to make iron for two or three months. And I heard that Lucy, Dolly and Mary have got hot spots on their sides—high up too. What d'ye know about it?

"Most of the hot metal they're making now is going to the Bessemers, which is the logical place to send it of course. They could let the Open Hearths have it and melt chill pig for the Bessemers in the cupolas, but that would be as idiosyncratic as shaving a mule to get hair to make a horse blanket for him to keep him from getting nipped by the frost when the north wind doth blow. What d'ye know about that?

"No, Denny, a fellow can't bat and bang round an old dump like this as long as you and I have without finding out a few things that are going on, eh? But meditate on it, Denny, meditate on it! Seven furnaces shut down and the furnace men up in the air simply because somebody added up two and two and got five! I hear the Old Man is negotiating with the Kirk Furnace people down at Ferro Junction for hot metal. Kirk thought he had made a contract with old Teller, when Teller was the Old Man here, to shoot hot pig up here over the stub and he went ahead and had the ladles built to haul it here in. But old Tellerinsky double-crossed him somehow, wiggled out of the contract, and instead of buying iron from Kirk he built Susie, Dolly and Lucy, leaving Kirk with those ladles on his hands. They're big devils, Denny—regular wallopers—hold sixty tons!

"You'll see them slipping in here some of these days soon, Denny, with the red stuff slopping over their tops, and then the Open Hearth will go full again. By golly-

Ned, I wouldn't want to ride on that hot-metal train if it gets to running! The stub from the Junction up is a pretty shaky piece of track, so McNutt tells me.

"Friend Denny, isn't that Lord Calla's physiology protruding through yon doorway of the foundry? It is! What d'ye know about that? Bid me a hasty farewell, Denny—I'm leaving via the kitchen entrance! What d'ye know about it?"

Somebody at Steelburg Mills had blundered and with three blast furnaces blown out in a bunch there was a shortage of hot metal. But Stanley Kirk had hot metal to sell. He had the ladles built and ready in which it could be transported from Ferro Junction to Steelburg Mills, and Steelburg Mills quit worrying and gave him a contract to deliver to the mills not less than one thousand tons of basic iron daily. And the contract was not to terminate in any brief period—Stanley Kirk had seen to that.

The furnace owner was jubilant—he had been trying to obtain such a contract, trying to sell hot metal to Steelburg Mills for years. He told United States Senator Masterson about his good luck one night at their club in the city and let him read his contract.

"I congratulate you, Stan," said the senator. "That contract will smooth out a lot of your worries. Sold in the casting ladle! Cheap selling, Stan, cheap selling! You'll soon recover the loss Teller caused you. I really must run out to Steelburg Mills some day and look about the place. I haven't been inside the plant for twelve or fifteen years—maybe more. I used to go to the gates and make noonday addresses to the workmen in my campaign for Congress, but I couldn't find time to get inside. They continue to grow of course?"

"Grow? Rather! But I can't see how they can build more blast furnaces until Vinegar Gully has been vacated and the ravine filled in. They are pinched for room in that direction."

"From what I've heard of that place it would be a

very good thing if it were wiped out. Why don't they buy it?"

"They can't. Cockshot and Conway, who run those two notorious saloons, The Bucket of Blood and The Morgue, as they are called—each one of them is a Klondike, I have heard—own every foot of the Gully now with the exception of a small parcel held by a young man named Gay, who works in the mills. Teller allowed those two ruffins to steal a march on him."

"The Mills will have to pay their price then. By the way, I don't suppose you ever see Nan Sorrel, do you, Stan?"

"I've seen her once or twice in the past year when she slipped out of the asylum and came wandering down to the Junction."

"Poor old thing! I wonder if she's properly taken care of up there. I send a sum of money to the superintendent of the institution every year for her, but I doubt if she benefits much from it. She's as flighty as ever, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, from what I hear. And crazy for whisky, too. One of my men has told me that she always goes to the old house when she comes to the Junction, rambles through it as though searching for something she had lost, then goes to those foreigners' saloons and begs and buys enough liquor to make her drunk, then back to the stone house, where she stays until they come for her. Why don't you have that old pile pulled down?"

"What's the use? I never see it. I'll deed it to you if you'll accept it."

"No, thanks; I don't want it."

The senator sat musing for several moments.

"I may have that place leveled, Stan. I'll run down to the Junction some of these days," he said. "Well, I must be going. Good night, Stan."

Stanley Kirk drew the contract from his pocket, read it through again and chuckled.

"It's a good one," he muttered.

And as the result of that very satisfactory contract, the huge rusty ladles that had been standing idle for years at Kirk's furnaces were soon rolling into the yards of Steelburg Mills. By day and by night they came. Filled to the slopping brim with the red molten metal, they trembled on their heavy trucks over the shaky bridges and culverts of the stub road connecting Ferro Junction and Steelburg Mills, bounced and bumped over the rough uneven tracks, and entering the mill yards, where there were many cross-overs and frogs and switch points, the red metal washed over the ladies' rims in fiery waves to rain down along the tracks in showers of tiny metallic spherules or fall into little pools and gullies of water and explode with sharp staccatic reports like the cracking of high-power rifles. Creeping slowly through the yards, they went winding in and out among the long black buildings on their way to the two five-hundred-ton mixers at the farther end of the Open Hearth, and because they were quadruple the size of any other ladies yet seen in the yards, men paused in their work to look at them as they rolled along the tracks; and because of their immensities, because of something threatening about their huge bulks, men avoided passing near to them, making wide detours when they would meet them. But in time they became accustomed to them and did not care, and on frosty mornings they liked to stand close to them and lay numbed fingers against the warm sides of the big vessels as they slipped slowly past.

A shipping clerk detouring three of the monsters one morning soon after they had started running met Yardmaster McNutt, whom he promptly hailed.

"What d'ye know about it, Mack, if one of those wallopers should tip over down there on that bank above the billet mill—say, just as it got opposite the roll train? The laddy-bucks below would get one lovely soaking, wouldn't they? They'd be washed up so thoroughly that

their wives wouldn't have to nag them about Saturday night baths for the next fifty years. What d'ye know about it?"

"They won't tip—they can't tip," said McNutt.

"Mack, anything can tip. I knew a haystack to tip once down near my old home town—Honeyburg on the White Fork, Mack. What d'ye know about that? A twenty-five-by-twenty-five-foot haystack standing in the middle of a flat ten-acre field! Skunks, moles, gophers, foxes, groundhogs and mice undermined one side and it tipped. It simply lost its equilibrium. Anything will tip that loses its equilibrium. That's why men tip—lack of equilibrium. I never tip more than a dime, but some suckers tip as high as four bits. I possess a very stable equilibrium. What d'ye know—what's the big rush to get away, Mack?"

Standing on the elevated floor of the Open Hearth, Wally Gay would watch the huge ladies slipping into place far below the mixers, able from his vantage point to look down upon the quivering surfaces of the red pools in the glowing bowls. Then he would see black ropes of steel dropping down out of the dirty dusks that obscured the lofty reaches of the high mixer building, dropping down silently, dropping down until they touched the trunnions of the vessel over which they descended, when the mighty bowl of molten metal would move upward—floating upward, it always seemed to him, watching—slowly, steadily, silently upward, until its rim reached the level of the top of the greater vessel. Then as the black hulk of the mixer rolled over to give its mouth to the ladle he would watch Gargantuan lips meet Gargantuan lips and listen to the gurgle, gurgle, gurgle of the mixer drinking the sixty tons of red liquid. And he would laugh sometimes at the fantastic pictures he allowed himself to see in the deep, candalent depths of the drained vessel as it floated down and down and down to its place on the tracks.

But always as he stood there on the elevated floor,

watching the discharging of the hot metal, there would come over him that old feeling of awe and wonder that had gripped him when, a little boy, he had stolen into the mills to hide himself behind some column or wall and there watch the driving engine and the whirring rolls and the laboring cranes and motors; the old awe that had remained with him through all the years he had labored in and about the mills, delving into the mysteries of steel, learning the significance of steel, sensing the greatness of steel. And always the old feeling of awe found expression in the old words of awe that had leaped to his lips a thousand times—"Oh, but it's great! Big work! Big work!"

Kirk's iron was good iron—for a while. Then it began to cause trouble. Wally, watching the laboratory reports on tests taken from the ladles at the mixers, noticed that the sulphur content of the iron was steadily climbing upward. It went up one point, two points, three points. Then, one day, he saw a seventy-ton heat of steel piled out in the stock yard in ingots. The next day the ingots came into the Open Hearth and were charged as scrap.

"Sulphur too high," explained the superintendent of the ingot mill, who had rejected the heat. "No orders for any steel with sulphur that high."

Wally made a list of the sulphur determinations on Kirk's iron for the past two weeks. He carried this to the meeting of the superintendents at the lunch table. For he now had a place at this table, sitting there with Ackerman, who had worked him for years as a roust-about and had named him "everybody's goat"; with Jaster, who had kept him slaving in a hot and wet underground tunnel beneath the ingot rolls; with Chief Clerk Calla, who had refused to give him a trial job in the accounting department because he did not consider him sufficiently cultured and refined—with these he sat, and with others who had once sneered at him and laughed at him and imposed upon him, and when Manning was

not present his voice carried as much weight as any of theirs.

To-day he spoke about the high-sulphur iron coming in from Ferro Junction, and read the list of sulphur determinations he had compiled. Goodlow listened carefully.

"I've had my eye on that sulphur too," he said. "I have phoned Kirk about it and I've written to him about it. Kirk has a good contract with us, but he can't unload that kind of junk on us indefinitely. If we didn't need his iron right now I'd give him a jolt. Keep that memorandum, Wally, and to-morrow morning I will go down to the Junction and line him up. I want to go down anyway—I've never been there. I'd like to have you to go with me, Wally—you've been watching this iron pretty closely and you know how it has been coming from the first. We'll run down on the hot-metal train. Tell McNutt to have it held for us at the Transfer."

Seated on a bench which stood on a flat car coupled to the last of the three ladies in the train, Goodlow and Wally traveled to Ferro Junction the following morning. As the four tall furnace stacks came in sight Goodlow remarked to his companion, "There they are—monuments to the Masterson family." And he then went on, "The Mastersons, I understand from what I've heard, were really great iron people—that is, old Kent Masterson and Kent Masterson, Jr. Dunwood Masterson was never interested in the industry; he was more the student than business man."

"I never knew anything about them," returned Wally. I've heard the name spoken about the mills—that is all."

"You've been to the Junction of course?"

"Oh, two or three times when I was a youngster beating through the country with a gang of other young Indians like myself. I don't remember anything about it."

"I'm going to put a flea into Kirk's ear about that

high-sulphur iron. There was another bad heat last night, wasn't there?"

"Yes, Number Ten came too high to pass."

"Well, here we are. That's the office building yonder, I suppose."

They entered the brick building that stood in front of the row of furnaces. Goodlow walked to the end of a hallway and looked into a room the door of which stood open. Stanley Kirk was at his desk talking to a white-mustached gentleman sitting near him. He heard Goodlow's step and turned and saw him.

"Hello, Goodlow!" he cried, rising and advancing to meet his caller. "Glad to see you down here. Are you acquainted with Senator Masterson, Mr. Goodlow? Let me introduce you. Senator, Mr. Goodlow of Steelburg Mills. You have heard me speak of him."

The two men shook hands. Then Goodlow turned and introduced Wally to Masterson. Kirk and Wally had met before, and they shook hands.

"Goodlow, I know what you're here for," said Kirk as the four sat down. "It's about that high-sulphur iron you've been getting for a few days."

"You've guessed it, Kirk," returned Goodlow. "Senator," and he looked at Masterson, "you may find my language somewhat sulphurous before this interview with my friend Kirk here is over."

Masterson smiled, but made no remark. He had been staring at Wally from the moment he had shaken hands with him and he continued to stare at him now, staring with such fixedness that Wally grew uneasy beneath his gaze.

"Senator Masterson will have no occasion to be disturbed by your language, Goodlow," laughed Kirk, "for I am going to explain things satisfactorily to you in about two minutes. We were puzzled where that sulphur was coming from, but now we have found out where we were picking it up and we have dropped a

certain pile of ore. We cleared the furnaces of it all last night. Here—look how we're going now."

Goodlow took the slip of paper Kirk handed him and studied it for some moments.

"That's all right if you keep it like that. But don't forget there's a sulphur clause in that contract."

"Tut, tut, Goodlow!" interrupted Kirk. "What's a pinch of sulphur between friends? Send me your bill for the trouble we've caused you."

Goodlow laughed and the conversation between him and Kirk quickly drifted into other channels. Wally, who had been growing more and more uneasy under Masterson's stare, excused himself and left the office. The door had hardly closed behind him when Masterson turned to Goodlow.

"Mr. Goodlow, who is that young man?" he asked, and there was a note in his voice that caused Kirk to look sharply at him.

"Wally Gay—Wellington Gay. He is assistant superintendent of our Open Hearth department. He is—"

"Yes, yes," broke in Masterson, "but who is he? Is he a Steelburger? Where does he come from?"

"I can't answer that question, Mr. Masterson. I don't know who he is, nor does the young man himself know. He came to Steelburg Mills in a car of pig iron, a baby a few days old. He grew up about the mills, forged ahead—"

"Tell me the entire story, will you, please," said Masterson, again interrupting, and as Goodlow proceeded to relate the history of Wally Gay, as he knew it, the Senator sat very quiet, and Kirk watching him knew that the story he was listening to was impressing him in some strange manner.

"Why, Goodlow, we have another Dud Dudley in young Gay," said Kirk as Goodlow finished.

Goodlow smiled.

"I hadn't thought of that, Kirk. There is something of a similarity in their histories, isn't there? Old

Dud Dudley, the pioneer ironmaster of England, was a wonderful character. I wonder he has not been exploited more by the writers of his country."

He and Kirk were soon again deep in conversation, but Masterson did not join in it; he showed no interest in the themes discussed—he sat staring at the floor at his feet.

Outside the office building Wally had walked over to the furnaces. He looked in at the engine room for a few minutes, watching the mighty blowing engines performing their herculean tasks. He talked with a foreman and had him point out to him where the break-out had occurred a year before, and stood with him where the four men had stood that were engulfed in the fiery flood that burst out upon them. He wandered about beneath the big bins where the laborers were making up the charges and he watched the skips rushing up and down the steep inclines and heard the rattling of rock and ore on the bells and hoppers at the furnace tops. And always in his ears wherever he went was the shrieking and the whining and the sobbing of the tortured air in the mains, being pressed and squeezed and forced through the tuyères.

He liked the splendid din that was all about him and he reveled in the thought of the bigness of the work he was seeing done. And when one of the furnaces slipped and with the roar of a volcano belched out its smokes and gases and hell-colored flames he laughed and ran with the furnace men to a place of shelter and there watched the downpour of chunks of ore and rocks of limestone and bits of glowing coke that the avalanche of fire in the depths of the big stack had hurled out. And a little later, when he had gone to watch the cast at one of the furnaces and a drop of the fiery fluid splashed at the runner's mouth, shot over the space that lay between him and the ladle, struck his hand and stuck there, burning in an instant through the skin and into the flesh beneath, he laughed again, brushed away

the red crumb of iron and licked the seared spot with his tongue.

He left the furnaces, climbed a steep hill and came to a roadway along which he walked a few hundred yards. He was now thinking of those two or three marauding expeditions he had made to Ferro Junction with his band of Vinegar Gully hoodlums years before, when he was a boy. He looked about him for landmarks, but could see none he could recall—yes, there was the big stone house on the hill behind the tall maples; he remembered that. He remembered, too, that a huge chestnut tree had stood in the yard close to the house, from which he and his gang had clubbed the chestnuts until a man came and chased them away. He wondered if the old tree yet stood there. He would walk up and see.

He climbed the weed-grown terraces leading up to the old house and entered the yard through a tangle of briars and bushes. Yes, there was the tree. And it was loaded with chestnuts. They would be ripe soon, he told himself. He looked at the house. It was falling into ruin—windows and doors were gone, the roof was tumbling in and the chimneys were half down. He recalled that the place was shut up when he was there after the chestnuts and he remembered that he and one of his gang had pried open a window, crawled inside and wandered through its big high-ceilinged rooms, upstairs and down.

He advanced to one of the ruined doorways and stood looking in. It was very dismal in there. Pale-green grasses and weeds grew up through a soggy, moldy floor; leaves had drifted in and were piled up in little rotting heaps in the corners; the walls were mildewed and the plastering had fallen away—naught but ruin, decay, desolation wherever he looked.

Suddenly he drew back, for a figure was advancing toward him across the big room into which he was gazing, the figure of an old woman. He could hear

her feet striking through the pale-green grasses and weeds as she came. Gray disheveled hair hung about a gray cadaverous face and the hollows out of which her beady eyes stared seemed to him to be as deep and black as the empty eye sockets of a skull. He noticed there was slaver on her lips and that she was hiccoughing, and the fumbling of her white bony fingers at the throat of the gray dress she wore made him think of fumbling fingers of hands long dead. Shuddering, he was turning away when she spoke, not so much to him as to herself.

"I can't find it! I can't find it! It's lost!"

Then his nearness seemed to rouse her and the wail turned to a whine.

"Give an old woman a piece of money to buy her a bit of drink!" she begged.

He continued to move away, but she followed him out through the doorway and into the yard and her whining and importuning became louder and more insistent. He thrust his hand into his pocket; his fingers touched a silver dollar; he drew it out and gave it to her, then turned and hurried away—through the cluttered yard, down the weed-grown terraces and into the roadway toward the furnaces and office building.

Below the house and below the road at the foot of the second hill, where the railway tracks ran, a man stood and watched Wally coming away from the old house. His black hair that bushed in profusion about the edges of the gray cap he wore was remarkably curly. An enormous nose and a chin conspicuous because of its almost entire absence gave to him features that were grotesque, ludicrous, made more so by his continuous squinting and blinking.

For some time he had been watching Wally. He had seen him going up the terraces and into the yard; he had seen him approach the old house and peer in at the ruined doorway and he had watched him steadily while he was in the presence of the old woman. Now

as Wally hurried away toward the brick office building he followed, moving along the railroad tracks that paralleled the roadway. When he saw the object of his observation join Kirk and Masterson and Goodlow in front of the office, where the three men were standing talking, he stopped.

"Going up fast!" he muttered. "Hobnobbing with United States Senators! It's a case! It's a good case! It would be riper later on, but I'll not wait. I'll touch him now and I'll touch him hard. He'll stand it. I ought to be getting into a bigger field. Nothing smaller than New York!"

He turned back, crossed the tracks and sat down behind an ore bin near one of the furnaces.

Masterson and Kirk were bidding Goodlow and Wally good-by.

"I shall probably see you at the mills in a short time, Mr. Gay," said Masterson as he shook hands. "I am coming to look the plant over. I haven't been there for a good many years. I am going to count on having you to show me through that new Open Hearth."

"I'll be glad to see you there," returned Wally, uncomfortable again under the gaze of the elder man.

There were four ladies of hot metal ahead of the flat car on which Goodlow and Wally sat as they traveled back to Steelburg.

"Wally, I should say that you have made quite an impression on Senator Masterson," said Goodlow, smiling as he spoke.

"I wish he wouldn't stare at me as if I were some strange animal broken out of a circus," growled Wally.

Goodlow laughed.

"Did he stare? Many people would consider themselves highly honored to have a United States Senator stare at them."

"I don't!"

"You're a queer one, Wally." And Goodlow chuckled as he looked at the young man beside him. "Well, I

don't think we'll have any more trouble with Kirk about high-sulphur iron," he went on. "Kirk is all right, but just keep an eye on the stuff. If the sulphur climbs up again I'll let you go down and jog his memory. And don't forget to mention that high-sulphur clause. He's afraid of that."

The train of ladles and the heavy engine drawing them rumbled along over the uneven tracks, winding in and out among the low hills through which the road ran. Once at a particularly rough spot a little wave of red slipped over the rim of one of the ladles.

"Something's got to be done about this road," said Goodlow, speaking more to himself than to Wally. "There'll be a spill out here some of these days. Rather rough traveling, isn't it?" he called to the conductor of the train, who was standing at the rear of the flat car.

"Rough ain't no name for it!" declared the conductor, coming forward. "This here road may be all right for haulin' baled hay or plug hats over, but for splashy freight like ours—nix! It makes a feller feel kind of squeamish, I want to tell you, sir, to be bounced and jounced round as we are, with all that red stuff right under our snoots. I've told McNutt that I'm goin' to quit my job this comin' Saturday if he don't take me off this run, and I'm goin' to. I ain't got no life insurance and my wife couldn't make a livin' if I was to pass in my checks sudden."

"Something must be done," repeated Goodlow. "I'll see if I can start anything. I doubt, though, if I can."

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPILL

THE following day Wally stood beneath the mixers watching the hot metal come in. The black ropes of steel dropped down from out the dirty dusks above and one of the huge ladles floated upward. The mixer's vast hulk rolled over and the rim of the ladle touched the mixer's mouth.

A man came up the iron stairway, crossed the platform and stood behind Wally. It was the man with the enormous nose, the superrecessive chin, the goose-berry eyes and the curly hair.

The ladle began to tip. Wally was watching it, his head thrown back, his eyes directed upward.

"Say, fellow!"

He looked back. He could not recall ever having seen the individual before him.

"I want fi—three thousand dollars out of you by midnight to-night!"

Wally stared. Then he grinned.

"What are you—a nut?" he asked.

"No, I'm not a nut!" returned the man, and there was a threat in his voice. "I say I want three thousand out of you and I mean it!"

Wally's grin broadened.

"How did you get out?" he asked. "Better run back to the big brick house on the hill and tell them to lock you up again. You might get hurt if you hang about this place."

He turned his eyes back to the ladle high above him.

It was tipping more and more and he could hear the molten metal gurgling into the mouth of the mixer.

"I told you once before I could find out something about your family! And I have—a lot!"

Wally did not take his eyes from the tipping ladle; he did not move, but with the speaking of the words behind him his muscles had tensed and the hot waves of anger, the old anger he had known so many times, were pouring over him, choking him, suffocating him.

"I must hold myself here!" was the thought that shot through his brain.

He remembered the man now—the scene at the mortar bed passed before his vision. It was a bad place for him to give way to his rage—here on the platform over the bowls of hot metal. The ladle had drained itself and was now dropping down.

"I say I found out something—a lot—everything!"

The voice was louder now, more confident. It seemed to Wally that an hour had gone by since the voice had spoken before, yet he knew that less than a minute had slipped away.

The ladle was dropping down and down. Now he could look into its fiery depths, but he saw no fantastic shapes therein as he sometimes did—he saw nothing but the red walls of the vessel—red, but not so red as the red anger that boiled within him. This thing that stood there behind him—if he could take it by the scruff of the neck, carry it to the edge of the platform, dangle it over that hole of fire, hold it there until it squirmed and whined and drew up its legs as he had once seen a tiny puppy which he had taken by the scruff of the neck! His muscles felt as if they would snap. He must—he would—

"I saw you talking to your mother yesterday at the old house!"

He gasped, a shiver ran over him and his knotted muscles went flaccid flesh. His hands groped out and grasped the iron railing that edged the iron platform and

he drew himself to it, twisted himself about with his back against it, facing the man. And horror looked out of his eyes. The man saw it and sneered.

"Well, you're coming across or I'm going to talk!"

The voice was still louder and the threat in it was now positive.

A minute—or was it ten, or was it sixty?—and Wally's body began to stiffen. His grasp on the iron railing loosened, he took a step forward, and another, very slowly. The man retreated, stepping back. Wally followed, placing each foot carefully and quietly upon the iron floor, moving as one might move sneaking up on an unsuspecting enemy to pounce upon him.

"Well, what are you going—" "

The question was not completed, for Wally had lunged forward and seized the man, forced his arms down against his sides and thrust him back into the deep channel of a huge steel column.

"What am I going to do?" he burst out. "What am I going to do? Make you prove what you have said to me or tear out your dirty heart and stamp on it! I'll make you prove your words or I'll squeeze your ugly soul out through your lying lips! You—" "

All the profanities, all the hideous and obscene words and foul and disgusting expressions he had heard and learned and used when he was growing up in Vinegar Gully, and which he had long been trying to eradicate from his sometimes too tenacious memory, came tumbling from his quivering lips.

"I can prove it!" whispered the now white-faced man in his grasp. "I can prove it!"

"Then you'll prove it! Bring me the proof! Bring the proof to me, and when you have brought the proof, then talk! Talk! Tell everybody! Tell all Steelburg what you have discovered and I will not deny it! But if you ever repeat, if you ever whisper what you have said to me here before you bring me that proof, I'll hunt you down, I'll follow you to the edge of hell,

but I'll get you! And when I get you I'll break you, I'll rip you, I'll tear you to rags! Get out of there! Quick!"

"I'll bring the proof!" And the man started toward the iron stairway, down which he ran. Wally followed and stood at the top of the stairs watching him descend. Near the bottom the man turned and looked up. "I'll bring the proof!" he called with a sneer on his lips. And then—"Oh, I'm not afraid!"

But he was afraid—he was frightened as he had never before been frightened. Every fiber of his body was shrinking; he trembled as one with ague chills, and a shipping clerk meeting him as he came out of the mixer building looked at him in astonishment.

"What d'ye know about that, Nosey-nose?" demanded the shipping clerk. "Man, you're shaking like a pepper box! Cold? Got chills? What d'ye know about it, with all this hot metal standing round here modifying the atmosphere? And what in Sam Hill are you doing in here? Is that a car clerk's book I see in your pocket? You don't mean to say you're working at Kirk's furnaces! Sneaked in here on the hot-metal train, eh? Well, if Roundsman Robbie, our efficient intramural bluecoat, finds you in here without a permit he'll land you on your ear in the gutter outside the gate. Gone to work again! Well, what d'ye know about that? And I thought you were a full-feathered detective by this time. How is the detecting biz nowadays, anyhow? Hey, don't tear yourself away!"

The shipping clerk gazed after the hurrying form of the man he had addressed as Nosey-nose.

"What d'ye know about that?" he asked himself. "Here's a theme ripe for discussion. I must pluck it. I'll peep in on my old college chum, McNutt."

"What d'ye know about it, Mack?" he asked of Yardmaster McNutt a few minutes later as he stood before the yardmaster's desk. "You haven't got that old plug of spit-quick lying about your desk, have you, that I

broke my gold tooth on two or three or four or five years ago? Well, well, well? How the time flies!"

He drew a chair to the side of the yardmaster's, elevated his feet to the level of that official's pedal extremities and sighed.

"Well, Mack, ad astra puella, as the old Romans used to say. A little Latin that I sopped up in Honeyburg High School, meaning—'Let us live in the present moment,' Mack. What d'ye know about it? I was just chatting with that former chinless sidekicker of yours, Sir Squint-lamps, as some of the boys called him, old Nosey-nose in other words, him whom you affectionately addressed as Jannie in your happier moments, as Janus in your unhappier—Janus Damrosch, the sleuth of Steelburg. He is now occupied in the capacity of clerk for Kirk's furnaces and he sneaked in here on the hot-metal train. What d'ye know about that? Wouldn't I like to see Roundsman Robbie fall foul of his trail? Say yes, Mack, and you'll have it right. He was coming out of the mixer building when I met him, shaking like a late leaf in autumn. I noticed Wally Gay standing up on the platform just a few minutes before as I passed that way."

McNutt opened his eyes and looked at the speaker for a few moments in silence. Then he lowered his feet and straightened up in his chair.

"Say, Bob, I'll tell you something."

He glanced at the door opening into his clerk's office and spoke in a low voice for several minutes.

"Well, I'll be dogged, danged if I won't! What d'ye know about that?" exclaimed the shipping clerk when the yardmaster had finished. "Cut the page out, eh? Now, what do you suppose he was up to? And say, I never told you, did I, how old Major Fronk found him snooping about in Wally's room at the Grand House? Oh, that was a long while ago! The major jumped him. Nosey-nose tried to make out he was tanked and had stumbled into the wrong room. But the

major slammed him a bump with an umbrella and caught him on the toe of his boot as he went out. When Wally came in he and the major went over everything, but couldn't find anything missing. What d'ye know about it? Now, what did that chinless gink want in there? He wasn't tanked—not a bit of it! He's too stingy to get filled up to the first hoop. I always said, Mack, it was too bad you didn't keep a memo of that car. It might have been possible—”

“Funny thing,” broke in McNutt. “Some time ago I ran across a foreign car down here in the yard—off a Western road. I don't know when I'd seen a car from that road in these yards. I glanced at the initials as I went by it and then I stopped and looked at them again, for there was something familiar about them. All at once it popped into my head that those were the initials of that car I put the blue pencil cross before in the car clerk's record—P. G. M. Of course it wasn't the same car—that car went to the scrap pile many a year ago. But those were the initials on Wally's car—P. G. M.”

“Well, I'll be danged, dogged if I won't! What d'ye know about that?” And the shipping clerk fanned himself with his hat. “But I guess Wally can take care of himself all right. He's pulling big stuff at the Open Hearth, isn't he? Manning doesn't get out very often now—I hear he's pretty well run down. They tell me Wally is making more steel, better steel and cheaper steel than was ever made here before. What d'ye know about it?

“Well, I must be trotting along. Scads of work ahead of me. What d'ye know about it, Mack? It's plug, plug, plugity-plug all the time in this old dump. No chance to take a little taper now and then—you're always going down for the third time in work. I hear they're slicking up the old joint for visitors—big guys. One of them is a United States Senator. What d'ye know about that?

“I've often thought, Mack, that the fellow who has

the job showing sightseers through this plant ought to find a chance every now and then to snatch off something pretty good. There's a lot of mighty big people who come out here to gawk. Suppose now, for example, you had the job of steerer, Mack, and you were showing this United States Senator through the place and you saw him walking straight into one of those puddles of worn-out oil and roll-train slush that lie about on the standings, so charmed with the mechanical scenery on every side of him that he wouldn't be watching where he was going. You'd touch him on the arm and say politely, 'Just a hair to the left, Senator, to avoid the pool of goo.' And when he saw what his patent leathers had missed he'd give you a grateful glance then and there and maybe a second or third class post office later on.

"Or suppose again that you were guiding this august guy through the dump and you spied a bulldozer dangling from a crane chain flying straight at him. You'd take him by the elbow and whisper, 'Kindly deflect your course, Senator, to prevent the bulldozer caving in your coco.' Shouldn't that be good for at least a consulship? I'll bet if I had the job of steering the rubber-necks through Steelburg Mills I'd have my light out from under the bushel in no time. Well, Mack, it's me back to the manila papers at once. What d'ye know about it?"

Wally lived through a never-ending agony of suspense and dread, waiting the coming of the man he had encountered beneath the mixers, bringing with him the proof that the hideous, repulsive, loathsome creature he had seen in the old ruins at Ferro Junction was his mother. He expected him; something told him he would return; something whispered to him a thousand times a day, "He'll come! He'll be here!" And through the long nights when he would lie awake staring up at the black ceiling, seeing in the darkness before him that cadaverous face, the stringy gray hair, the sunken eyes in hollows that were as deep as the empty eye sockets of

a skull, the slavering lips, the fumbling fingers at the bony throat—something was whispering to him all the while, "He'll come! He'll be here!"

He was nerving and steeling himself for the blow when it should fall. His decision was made—he would not buy off the man. If the proof were positive he would attempt no denial. Let the fellow make known his ugly discovery—he would not deny it!

He had written and told Amy Creeth what confronted him. Not for an instant had he hesitated to do this, and he found strength and comfort in the words she had written and repeated in the letter she sent back to him—"Everything will work out for the best, my dear—everything. And it will make no difference with me."

One Sunday he traveled down to Ferro Junction and of a foreman at Kirk's furnaces made inquiry concerning the man he was awaiting. The foreman told him he had not seen Damrosch for some time—he had heard he had quit his job there. Asked about the old woman at the ruined house on the hill, the foreman said he knew nothing except what he had been told by some of the men—that she had once lived there and that she now belonged at the asylum in Steelburg. He talked with a number of other workmen, but could obtain no definite information regarding her. He went to Ferro Junction again. At the shanty of an old watchman at a railroad crossing he stopped and asked about the woman. The old man laughed.

"Oh, that's Nan Sorrel," he said. "She's a bug from the Steelburg bug house. She manages to get away from them two or three times a year and comes wanderin' down here and gets drunk at them furriners' saloons and goes up to the old Masterson house and rummages about it. I don't see why they don't keep closer watch on her at the asylum. She'll get killed down here some day, though I reckon there'd be nobody would cry if she did. Old Nan hasn't got nobody to care for her. She's always looking for somethin' up there at the old house, and

she comes down here to me sometimes, whinin' out, 'I can't find it! I can't find it!'

"I've knowed Nan Sorrel all her life—knowed her when she was a little girl and Kent Masterson brought her here from the poorhouse to work about the stone house up there. She looks old, but she ain't so old as she looks—not near so old as I am. She never was plumb right upstairs, I reckon, but Kent sent her to school and treated her well and she made a mighty good servant. Kent, he died, and she worked for Dunwood's mother, and then the old lady died and she stayed on at the old house with the two or three other servants they had.

"Then Dunwood, he goes away East to school and then he comes back and then he goes away again, this time to travel in Europe or sommers, and while he was gone that time he got married. But he didn't have his wife with him when he come back. That was funny, but nobody here ever knowed why. If I'm rememberin' right, it was about that time that Nan Sorrel got to gettin' real bad in the head.

"It must've been the better part of a year after Dunwood got back when his wife come. He didn't know she was comin', I guess, for he wasn't at home. Nan Sorrel was in the big house that night alone—the other servants had gone away visitin'. The woman come to the city and got a cab to fetch her out to the Junction. The cabman was drunk and got lost up here along the canal and drove in the canal or somethin' and the woman was nearly dead when she finally got to the house, so we heard. And she was dead all right when Dunwood got home the next day. And Nan was crazy as a loon.

"I always thought Nan was stuck on Dunwood when they was growin' up. They was about the same age, but Nan was the oldest. But Dunwood was always a proud, high-headed chap. He got that from his mother, whose name was Dunwood. If I'm not forgettin', Kent brought his wife—Dunwood's mother, you know—here from the South."

The old watchman looked toward the great stone house that now showed bleak and ugly behind the leafless maples.

"Yes, sir, that there was once the swellest place in all this part of the country. Old Kent Masterson built it and Kent Junior improved and added to it. But Dunwood never seemed to care for it. He never stayed there a day after his wife come back that time to her death, and it's just gone plumb to rack and ruin."

"But I wish them asylum people'd keep old Nan locked up. She gives me the creeps. She looks like the very Old Scratch!"

Wally left the old man and returned to Steelburg. He had learned all he could hope to learn. There was nothing further he could do—he would wait the coming of the man.

Masterson came to the mills with a number of his friends. All his interest seemed to be centered in the Open Hearth, and while Goodlow was showing the other visitors through the various departments he sat with Wally in his office talking with him, or walking with his hand on the young man's arm along the floor in front of the long row of furnaces. The Senator's dignified bearing, his finely modulated voice and the ease with which he conversed fascinated Wally, but he was not happy in the man's presence—he knew Masterson's eyes were fixed on him almost constantly.

As they stood behind one of the furnaces, whither they had walked to watch the tap, an overhead crane carrying a long runner, out of the glowing ends of which dripped molten steel and slag, passed over them. Suddenly a chain hook snapped and the runner, now held by but one lug, dropped down and swung about, while the slag and steel that lay in the trough of the runner poured out and splashed on the floor near the two men.

"Get back!" shouted Wally.

Masterson turned to flee, stumbled forward, and trying to save himself from falling, set his foot upon a

pile of splasher handles and tapping bars. His foot shot between two of the heavy bars and jammed.

In the same instant, it seemed—so quickly did he act—Wally had seized a short piece of iron that lay on the floor near by, thrust it between the bars and forced them apart. Masterson jerked out his foot and they sprang away—and as they did so the spinning runner discharged a mass of molten steel and slag upon the spot where they had stood.

Masterson walked across the floor and sat down on a workman's bench. He was bareheaded, his clothes were soiled and he breathed heavily, but he laughed as he looked up at Wally.

"For an old blast-furnace man that was a pretty awkward caper I cut there," he said. "You saved me from serious injury. I wonder, now, just where my hat is."

"The last I saw of it it was sailing over into the pit," laughed Wally. "I'll see what happened to it."

He went back to the platform, looked over the railing and returned.

"It's gone—it fell squarely on a bowl of new slag."

"Well, I declare! Will I have to go home bareheaded? I wouldn't like to do that."

"Oh, I can let you have a hat. Come up to the office."

They went to Wally's office, where he brought out his street hat. Masterson tried it on.

"A fit!" he cried. "I'm surprised indeed, for I have the largest head of any man I ever met." He peeped into a mirror that hung on the wall. "And a very becoming hat it is too!"

He was in high good humor when he started to leave, wearing Wally's hat, about which he had had much to say because of its fitting him as it did. At the top of the stairs he turned to shake hands.

"I want you to come to see me, both at my office in the city and at my home. May I expect you sometime—and that very soon?"

Wally thanked him, but gave him no definite an-

sver, offering for excuse that he was busy with night study with one of the professors at the Polytechnic.

Masterson returned the hat the following day with a note of thanks and in the fortnight that followed he wrote twice, repeating the invitation he had made in the mills. But Wally did not go to see him, finding the same excuse he had before offered. Then the Senator went to Washington.

The winter neared its close and the man Wally awaited had not come.

The winter neared its close and the road-bed and tracks of the stub line connecting Ferro Junction and Steelburg had not been repaired.

The winter neared its close and the huge ladles of hot metal continued to roll through the mill yards, winding in and out among the black buildings, little waves of red slopping over the rims where the crossovers and frogs were many. And the mixers continued to give their mouths to the tipping ladles and to drink the red liquid, then to pour it out into smaller ladles that carried it and poured it into the furnaces. And the red iron in the furnaces became white steel, and the white steel in the molds became red ingots and the red ingots became white blooms, to be rolled and squeezed and pressed into bars and billets and rails and channels and girders. And the mills continued to rumble and roar and the furnaces and converters to flame and flare and ever a pillar of fire hovered over Steelburg by night, a cloud of smoke by day. But the man Wally Gay awaited did not come.

Every minute of every hour of every day and every night of that winter that was nearing its close he had been awaiting him. He was awaiting him now. Something was telling him all the while that he was coming—he heard the old whispering, "He's coming! He'll be here!"

Was there a knock at his door in the dead of night? "Here he is," he would tell himself. Did some one

touch him on the arm in the street? "He has come," he would mutter before he turned his head. Did some one come and stand before him as he sat in hotel or bank or waiting room? He would shudder before he raised his eyes.

Old Major Fronk now had more time and still more time to read his bound volumes of old magazines, to play old tunes on his old violin, to breathe anathema against the swart-faced sons of Europe who had made of Steelburg the hideous hole of a place it was, for Wally Gay, the pupil, had outgrown Major Fronk, the master. The thick volumes in which Wally now read were beyond the major's comprehension—he refused to look at them any more. He no longer had a pupil whom he could teach.

"By gad, Wally," he burst out one night, "I wish you weren't so damn smart! Blast me, if I don't wish you were again the Vinegar Gully dub you were when I took you in hand! I'm a has-been! I'm done! I might as well go out and crawl beneath the sod!"

Wally closed the heavy volume he was reading and tossed it aside.

"Get out that old fiddle, major, and let's have a concert!" he laughed. "Tear off all our favorite old tunes and then we'll spend a delightful hour or two cussing out the bohunks. Then I'll read you your favorite chapter from Rabelais."

The major went to bed that night smiling and happy, and Wally sat up two hours past his usual bedtime to cover the reading assigned to him by Prof. Roy Elroy, of the Polytechnic.

Throughout the winter Stanley Kirk had sent none but good iron to Steelburg Mills. Then in early March, Wally, watching the mixer tests, noticed that the sulphur content was increasing. A little it climbed, a little more and a little more. He waited a few days to see if the figures would not change for the better, but when they moved on steadily upward and were approaching the danger point he spoke to Goodlow.

"All right, you may go down and talk with Kirk about it," said Goodlow. "Just let him know that we are on the job up here and that we keep our eyes open. Take a copy of the contract with you and if he feels inclined to argue the question show him that sulphur clause. You might casually refer to the surplus stock of pig we are accumulating here, and you could mention too in an offhand way that we are talking of two new blast furnaces. And say, Wally, don't you think you should make the trip to the Junction and back in a machine? There hasn't been a thing done to that piece of track."

"Oh, no, I'll go on the hot-metal train. I'd rather go that way—the wagon road must be in horrible shape after these rains we've been having." And Wally left Goodlow's office.

It was past the middle of the afternoon when he started for the Junction. The day was bleak and dismal and a cold wind blew out of the north. As he stood on the flat car that trailed the three empty ladles he could see how the heavy rains of the past several days had washed and cut into the hillsides along which the tracks ran. A heavy snow had fallen the night before and lay in piles and patches over the soggy earth, slowly melting and adding to the floods that choked the creeks and brooks and runs to overflowing. The wagon road, he noticed, when it ran close to the railroad tracks, was gorged and gullied and deep in slush and mud. He was glad he had not chosen to travel that route.

Kirk greeted him with a laugh as he entered the furnace owner's office.

"Hello, Gay! High-sulphur iron again, eh? Sit down, sit down and let me tell you all about it!"

Wally took the chair that was pushed forward to him. "I've been away for two weeks. That accounts for the high sulphur. Been East—Pittsburgh, New York, Philadelphia, Washington. I saw Senator Masterson at Washington. He was asking about you. Now this iron, Mr. Gay—don't you people at Steelburg get to worrying

about my iron. I know exactly what you want and I know what you don't want. After I left, my superintendent began using from our pile of Ajax ore. That's where the sulphur comes from. Our stock has been running a trifle low and I told him he could dip into the Ajax pile, but I didn't intend he should dip so deep as he did. I'll soon have things back in shape again."

"What are you making now?" asked Wally. "May I see your sheets?"

Kirk handed him a number of slips of paper. Wally studied them for a few moments.

"We'll take the next drag—the one you are now making up—but you needn't send us any more until things have cleared up completely. We're in very good shape up there now to take care of ourselves, so we won't be inconvenienced if we have to cut off from you."

Kirk looked disturbed.

"All right, all right," he said, concealing his annoyance in a little laugh. "I'll send everything to the pig machine until the iron is running clear again. But I'm sure you can look for metal sometime to-morrow afternoon. Did I mention that I saw Masterson while I was away? Masterson is interested in you, Gay. If you should care to drop the steel business I believe he would——"

"No, steel is my line," interrupted Wally.

"But if he should make you an exceptionally attractive offer? You know, Gay, there is talk—strong talk—that the Senator may be called on——"

"No, I wouldn't be interested," broke in Wally again. "I'm going to stay in Steelburg—that is, if they'll let me."

Kirk stared at him in silence for several moments. Then he smiled.

"Well, if they won't, just let me know and I'll give you a job that will keep you from starving."

"Thanks," returned Wally, with a laugh, and he rose from his chair. "I want to go out and look over your new unloading machinery, which I hear you have recently installed."

"I'll go with you. But really, Gay, if I were you I'd run down to Washington sometime and see the Senator. I know he wants to see you there."

"I may go some of these days—when I find time."

It was dusk when the train of four ladies of metal started for Steelburg. Kirk, standing by the track side, waved his hand at Wally as the ladies passed from sight about a curve in the road.

"I see it now," Kirk muttered. "Strange I didn't notice it before! Masterson is right. But it's a mystery. If—but pshaw! It couldn't be!"

Wally was alone on the flat car, the conductor and his brakeman having climbed into the engine cab, ignoring the rules that made it imperative that one of them should travel at the rear of the train.

It had grown colder and had started to freeze and the wind was keen and piercing. The gray clouds drifted low and the glare from the red metal in the huge vessels lighted them up, bringing them closer to earth, it seemed, and revealed them rolling and tumbling in fantastic shapes. There was the sound of running water along the tracks, for all the gorges and gullies and ditches were full, and down in the wagon road that now and then paralleled the railroad little rivers ran in little gorges where the wheel tracks had been.

Wally drew his ulster closer about him and walked up and down the flat car, now and then catching hold of the hand rail as the car lurched over some particularly rough piece of tracks.

Half the distance to Steelburg had been covered and he noticed that there the wagon road was following the base of the little hill the railway was rounding. It lay there below him—but a little way below him—and he could look down upon it and see the little gorges cut out where the wheel tracks had run. And as he looked he saw a figure moving along in the rapidly gathering gloom—a woman traveling in the direction the train traveled. He wondered that a woman should walk

in such a place and in such weather. As he watched her she raised her head and looked at him, but he could not distinguish her features in the dusk.

Had he been closer he could have seen that she was old and gaunt and her appearance was ghastly, deathlike. Strings of gray hair were blown by the wind about her gray withered face and there was slaver on her lips and she hiccupped. Bony fingers blue with cold fumbled at her skinny neck. The skirt of the gray dress she wore was sodden and draggled and the wind pushed it against her lean legs and held it there. Her feet went deep into the icy slush and mire as she set them wearily down, and her shoes had broken and fallen away and her stockings burst until patches of flesh showed through, washed strangely white by the dirty water in which she walked. And as she went she was moaning and mumbling, "I can't find it! I can't find it!"

A sudden lurch of the train caused Wally to glance ahead. He saw a wave of red roll over the rim of the first ladle, a wave from the second ladle, from the third and from the fourth. Then came a mighty crash and a crunching and breaking of timbers and he beheld a flaming torrent of red pouring down the hillside. Two of the ladles had gone over together; a third quickly followed and the fourth wavered and hung balanced on the broken bridge girders.

A multitude of deafening explosions followed as the molten metal ran into the puddle holes and trickled into the thousand little water-soaked depressions, and there rose an overwhelming sound, thunderous roaring and stridulous whining and hissing as the streams of fire cut through the streams of water. White fogs of steam and queer-colored clouds of smoke came suddenly into existence to mingle and float away in the weird, unearthly glare that spread from the spilled iron.

Wally had leaped from the car to the ground at the side of the tracks. As he jumped his eyes had gone down to the roadway where he had seen the woman walking.

She was gone—she had passed behind a clump of bushes by the roadside and the clump of bushes, he saw, stood in the path of the descending torrent. He could see a dozen red rivulets racing down through the leafless undergrowth that covered the hillside, sputtering and blazing and crackling. And then the bushes burst into flames.

Just for a moment he had watched it all. Then he sprang forward to run down the little hill to the road, intending to detour the flame-swept area. A dozen steps he had taken when he stumbled, pitched forward, and his head struck against a boulder hidden from his sight by a cloud of drifting smoke.

How long he lay there where he had fallen he did not know, but he was aware that it was only for a little while. When he opened his eyes a tiny stream of fire was sputtering and hissing past him very close to his face. He put his hand to his head and felt warm blood trickling from a great gash cut in his scalp by the rock. He climbed to his feet and stumbled on, came to the bottom of the hill, to the yellow road, stepped across a brook of fire and across another and saw her lying close to the clump of bushes behind which she had passed from his sight—they were burning now—with the red metal all about her, with the flow of one little river of it dammed by her body.

She lay with her face in the yellow clay as though she was hiding her eyes, and her garments were ablaze. As he came closer to her she threw out her arms, put down her hands and tried to raise herself, and he thought she had heard him coming. He gathered her up and ran and so frail and slight was her body that it was, it seemed to him, quite without weight.

He felt the pain of fire on his hands and on his face as the flames from her burning garments licked about him, and once he cried out as—unseeing—he placed his foot in a red puddle hole. Then he laid her down on a bank at the edge of the road and beat and tore at the flames that were all about her; jerked off his ulster and

wrapped it tightly around her and rolled and tumbled her over the ground until he knew the last spark of the fire was smothered out.

A dead tree that stood not far from them burst into flames and by its light he gazed at her and recognized her. She looked up at him and she was very quiet and she spoke quietly.

"I remember now," she said. "I remember everything. I put it in a car and there was iron in the car and I shut the door. There were letters on the car and numbers and I wrote them down in a book because I was afraid. The letters were a P and a G and an M. I remember them. And the numbers were a six and a seven, a six and a seven—"

Her voice was growing weaker and she was hesitating. "A six and a seven, a six—I wrote them down in a book—and I put the book behind—behind—"

She ceased speaking and struggled for a moment trying to free her hands from the folds of the heavy ulster that wrapped her about. Then she lay very still and he knew she had died. But not for a long while did he go away from her. Behind him a stream of red metal whined and howled as it cut and guttered into the icy waters of the swollen creek. The dead tree flamed up brighter and brighter, then fell with a spark-scattering crash. And the fourth ladle that had hung balanced on the burning timbers of the broken bridge rolled over and poured another red torrent down the hillside.

He climbed up to the tracks, went along them to the edge of the bridgeless stream and shouted across to the men of the train crew who stood about the derailed locomotive that was making the hills echo and reecho with the incessant screeching of its shrill whistle.

". . . the metal was all about her, some of it washing against her, and as I came close to her she raised herself, put out her hands and they dipped into the awful stuff. She was crying when I picked

her up and carried her away, but she did not cry after I had laid her down at the roadside; after I had beaten out and smothered out the flames. I see it all again and I am sick at heart and sad. . . .”

With bandages about his face and head, with one hand in a sling and the other partially bandaged, with a crutch standing by his table, Wally was writing a letter to Amy Creeth ten days after the wrecking of the hot-metal train.

“. . . and so by that fact I am convinced, positively convinced, that she was my mother. For the letters she repeated to me were the initials of the car I came to Steelburg in and the numbers she spoke—six and seven, six and seven—were the only two figures in that car’s numbers. You remember that I told you the car was P. G. M. 67677. Joe Gay wrote it down in his Bible and I have never forgotten it—I couldn’t forget it any more than I could forget my own name. And do you know, I looked in the old Bible to-day and that page on which Joe wrote is missing! I suppose it was lost out while I was moving up here from Vinegar Gully. But it makes no difference—of that I have no doubt, none at all. For she said, ‘I put it in the car and there was iron in the car and I shut the door. . . .’

“. . . I had her decently buried in the little cemetery at Ferro Junction. The asylum superintendent offered no objections. He asked a few questions, but I evaded them.

“I know you will approve of my refusing Manning’s position. It took all the courage I possessed to say no to Goodlow, for it is a big job. When I told him I was going East with Professor Elroy for a year, or maybe more, of special work—hard driving work we expect to make of it—in a New York institution, he shook me warmly by the hand, told me

I was doing the wise thing, wished me success and said there would always be a place for me at Steelburg Mills.

"... I have decided to go through Washington and see him. He is so persistent with his invitations. I cannot understand why he is so interested in me. I liked him, he fascinates me, but I wish he wouldn't gawk at me so much. And do you know, he has written me recently offering me what I suppose would be considered a very attractive position? I haven't given it a thought, nor will I. I like Steelburg.

"I think we should live in Steelburg. Of course it isn't a nice place or a beautiful place, but I know I belong here. And deep within me, Amy, there is a feeling that some day I shall be able to do something for Steelburg, to help to clean it up, to make it a more decent place. . . .

".... would have written this letter last evening, but that chatty shipping clerk I have so often spoken to you about in my letters came in on me and nearly talked my arm off. I couldn't get a word in edge-wise. If I ever get the chance I'm going to give him a job that will be nothing but talk—he'll have to talk all the time to hold it."

As Wally hobbled down to the post office to mail his letter a man sitting in Grover Grunt's barber shop with his feet on the laundry shelf and with a generous slice of Grover Grunt's natural leaf in his cheek saw him pass the window.

"What d'ye know about that, Grover?" he asked the barber. "There goes Wally Gay all bandaged up from the burns he got in the hot-metal spill. I had a nice conversation with him last night up at the Grand House. Grover, he's a mastodon. It lifts you up, it inspires you, it makes you want to build thee more stately mansions

for thy soul, Grover, to talk to a man like him. It's men like Wally Gay, Grover, that keep me from being a socialist. I look at Wally Gay and then I go to the mirror and take a slant at 'yours truly.' I cogitate on what Wally Gay has accomplished at Steelburg Mills and then I cogitate on what 'yours truly' has accomplished there in a like length of time, and I say to myself, 'Nix on that socialism stuff!' And I keep right on voting the Democratic or Republican ticket—whichever side puts up the best man.

"Well, Grover, as I reflected before, what d'ye know about it? Here's Wally ripe and ready to step into Manning's shoes as Manning steps out of them. Does he step? He does not step. Instead he throws up everything he's got and trots off to school, or so I've heard it rumored—of course I don't know. Goodlow's clerk told Hoppy Stapp and Hoppy told Skinny Thudd and Skinny told me. But that's Wally—long-sighted. You and I are not that kind. You and I see the pullet's egg of to-day and we grab it: Wally sees the goose egg of to-morrow and he waits for it. You and I, Grover, if we'd done for a United States senator what Wally did for Senator Masterson would by this time be in Washington hopping bells in the Senate or guarding the United States Treasury. For just as sure as your name is Grover Grundt the Senator must have offered something to Wally for saving him from getting fried when that runner nearly came down on him. Gabe Dinky heard him inviting Wally to come out and see him. What d'ye know about that?

"I can't deny, Grover, that it makes me feel a trifle chesty to know that I am responsible for Wally Gay's getting where he is. You see, Grover, I discovered him. I was the first to tumble on the fact that Wally was a mathematical monstrosity. From that day to this he has steadily climb. I tried to get Calla Lily to let him have a shot at rustling the manila papers in the shipping department, but Calla Lily said he was too coarse and un-

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refined. What d'ye know about that? Wouldn't it give you a pain in the eyewinker? Now he makes Calla Lily look like a paper collar that's been turned twice.

"Yes, sir; when I think of Calla Lily and that lemon-beaned Ackerman and that sap-headed Jaster, who made a mule, a goat, and a Percheron horse out of Wally for so long, sitting at the lunch table every day and listening to the line of conversation that must pass between Goodlow and Wally and Rattlebones Mackenzy, I feel so joyful I could sing.

"Funny, isn't it, that nothing ever came out about who Wally is? Never a word. Nobody ever claiming him, nobody ever saying he's his or he's hers. Not a peep, yeep or cheep from anybody. Nobody knows and nobody tries to guess.

"Say, what d'ye know about it? My head itches! I believe I'll take a shampoo. Fan the suds, Grover, fan the suds! I want to get to bed early to-night—got a barge of work to get rid of to-morrow and I want to make a good stiff start before the sun gets hot."

CHAPTER XV

THE STRIKE

TROUBLE in the steel mills, trouble of a hundred kinds coming in a hundred shapes and forms. Trouble in every mill and shop and department, at every furnace, in every nook and corner of the yards where men work. Trouble at morning, noon and night—trouble twenty-four hours of the day. Trouble of the kind that stops work, checks production, drives foremen and bosses and superintendents and managers into a state of nervous and physical exhaustion within a few days, and causes high officials and directors to grow restless and uneasy.

Trouble of the kind that results in ugly battles, in killings and maimings and bruising; in burnings and wreckings and pillage; that leaves mighty engines and costly machines broken beyond repair, mills dismantled, furnaces ruined, warehouses gutted; that brings to all concerned but one thing only—loss.

Trouble of the kind that starts when certain full-fed, well-dressed, oily-tongued soft-handed gentlemen appear just outside the mill-yard gates and begin to talk; gather at the bars of foul-smelling saloons just outside the mill-yard gates and with full glasses of whisky and brimming glasses of beer before them continue to talk; meet in gloomy upstairs rooms, lamp-lighted, close and dirty, and assuming leadership, plead, cajole, threaten, command.

Trouble of the kind that grows, spreads and flourishes with the repeated utterings of the words "rights," "representations," "justice," "equity," "fair play," "shorter hours," "more money," "privileges."

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Trouble of the abominable kind that the steady men, the hard-working men, the sober men, the dependable men, men whose records are clear and good, deplore, loathe, despise; of the abominable kind that the loafers, the floaters, the boomers, the shirkers, the slackers, the boozers delight in. These latter receive their orders from the full-fed, well-dressed, oily-tongued, soft-handed gentlemen outside the mill-yard gates, and then—

A heat mysteriously taps itself in the Open Hearth and seventy tons of molten steel pour into the pit. Another heat, for some reason unexplained, is taken cold, chills in the ladle, smears the molds and freezes in the pouring nozzle. A crane breaks down and refuses to work until a battered switch is found and repaired and a cut feed wire spliced. The gas flow is checked and the furnace men yell vainly for gas until the boss at the producers finds the stokers clogged with cinders and ashes, and the gas pokers asleep.

At the rail mill, at the billet mill, at the ingot mill ingots come from the soaking pits too hot, too cold, too green, and go to pieces in the rolls—crack and sliver and fin, fall asunder, make cobbles and scrap—and the tonnage drops down and down.

The strippers at the Bessemer function faultily and the tracks are choked with buggies of red ingots that become black ingots and must be toppled from the stools. And the entrances and the exits of the buildings and all the open spaces become cluttered with molds and stools and scrap and spilled metal.

Something is the matter at the blast furnaces; something is the matter at the rod mill; something is the matter at the coke ovens, at the ore docks, at the inspection yards, at the foundries, at the smiths' shops, at the pig machines, at the slag dumps, at the coal bins—something is the matter in every nook and corner of the yards where men work.

Men come late to work with dirty, unwashed faces, with bleary eyes, with evil intent in their hearts—swag-

gering, slouching, leering and sneering. They go to their posts of duty, sit down, yawn, talk, smoke cigarettes, drink boldly from big bottles of cheap booze, open their lunch pails and begin to eat un hungrily, slowly, carefully, fletcherizing with exaggerated deliberateness, until the foremen come protesting, when they leap up, growl, curse, threaten, shut up their pails and leave the mills.

And the foremen gather together to discuss the situation. They shake their heads and advise caution and recommend patience, give vent to their disgust, damn their jobs, wish they had never left the farm or that they had gone into the priesthood or had studied law or had become college professors. And when they leave the plant after their turns have ended they go through the gates and along the dark streets in twos and threes, each man with his right hand in the pocket of his coat.

It is wise for the foremen to do this when there is trouble in the steel mills—the kind of trouble the steady, sober, dependable, hard-working men loathe and despise; the kind the floaters and the slackers and the boozers delight in.

And so it was that Goodlow, general manager of Steelburg Mills, walking through the yards one morning, taking a short cut from the street-car line to his office, stopped near the billet mill and stared in wrath and astonishment. In the stock yard lay piled five heats of Open Hearth steel in ingots. Two of the piles were nearly black; two were dull red; the fifth was cherry red and it was giving off little cracking, sputtering noises as it cooled.

"Three hundred and fifty tons of steel piled out and everybody howling his head off for steel!" he muttered.

He wondered why Crittenden, his secretary, had not spoken of this. Every morning at eight-thirty Crittenden telephoned to Goodlow at his house just before he was leaving for his office, giving him a résumé of the night's work at the mills. This morning he had spoken of an unexplained two hours' delay at the rod mill, of two cold

heats at the Open Hearth, of a car wreck at the coke ovens and of several other lesser occurrences, but he had said nothing of steel having been piled out at the billet mill.

Goodlow turned and walked rapidly into the mill and sought Hornsby, the superintendent.

"What's that steel out there, Hornsby?" he demanded. Hornsby shrugged his shoulders.

"Trouble," he replied. "Trouble with the heating last night. Sleight told me Droege came to work pretty well shot, and by midnight he was completely shot. He burned one heat, drew two cold ones, and Sleight had to put Freer on. Freer couldn't get the work out, things got balled up all along the line and they had to pile out steel."

"Did Sleight fire Droege?"

"No, not that I know of."

"Tell him to fire the man when he comes out to work to-night if the facts are as you have stated."

Hornsby said nothing—he stood gazing after Goodlow as the latter walked away. The general manager had gone perhaps fifty feet when the mill superintendent called to him. Goodlow turned and looked back.

"Why, say, Mr. Goodlow," began Hornsby hesitatingly as he came up—"about firing Droege. I'll tell Sleight what you said, of course, but do you think—have you heard anything?"

"Anything? What?"

"Why—well, about trouble?"

"No, have you?"

Goodlow had been out of town for two days.

"It looks to me like something is starting. I heard that the Leaguers had a meeting up in Vinegar Gully—two of them, I guess."

"That so? What have you noticed about here that doesn't look right?"

"Somebody put a stoker out of commission in the gas house this morning; the cinder men are not doing their work as it ought to be done; there was a lot of booze

brought in over the fence yesterday, and there are hitches here and there all over the mill."

"Who are the men who are showing up bad?"

"Foreigners mostly, with some of the chronic soreheads we've got."

"Any signs of dissatisfaction among the old standbys?"

"No, I haven't noticed anything."

Goodlow talked earnestly with Hornsby for several minutes.

"You needn't tell Sleight to fire that heater," he said as he moved away. "He may use his own judgment. And you may use your own judgment too, Hornsby, in these matters you have been speaking about. I'll see you at the meeting at noon."

He walked on down through the yard. Once he came upon a little group of men behind a building talking excitedly. They scattered hurriedly when they saw him approaching.

At the Bessemer he beheld a sight that caused him to mutter angrily again. There had been a spill and the iron had not yet been cleaned up. Some of it lay on the narrow-gauge track blocking a long line of mold buggies waiting to draw in. The floor of the mill was covered with scrap and slag and spittings, and broken molds and stools. He observed Shull, a foreman, at work with a gang of men trying to clean up the mess, but he could see the man was making slow progress.

"What is it, Castrow?" he asked as the Bessemer superintendent came up.

Castrow threw up his hands.

"Trouble!" he cried disgustedly. "Trouble! And this is just the beginning! The Leaguers are at it again. Four more organizers arrived yesterday. They've established headquarters up in the Gully at Cockshot's and Conway's saloons."

He went on to disclose to Goodlow what he had heard of the activities of the Leaguers and to relate what had

occurred in and about the Bessemer in the past twenty-four hours.

As they stood talking they saw Shull, the foreman, approach a workman who was leaning against a column, smoking a cigarette. For a long while the man had been idling, rolling and smoking one cigarette after another. They saw Shull speak to the idler, who thrust out his face and said something in return. Shull pointed toward a doorway of the mill building. The man took a step backward and then swung the shovel he was holding, over his head. The foreman leaped forward, his fist shot out and caught the man on the jaw, who staggered back and fell, scrambled to his feet in an instant and with all his speed ran out of the mill. The foreman seized the shovel and hurled it after him.

"That's unfortunate at a time like this," said Goodlow. "Call him over here, Castrow."

Shull came at Castrow's beckoning.

"What was the matter there?" asked Goodlow.

"That man hasn't done ten minutes' work all morning. I asked him to get busy and do something. He told me to go to hell. I ordered him out of the mill—and told him to go get his time. You saw what followed."

"All right, Shull, I don't blame you—there wasn't anything else for you to do," said Goodlow. "But hold yourself as much as you decently can. There may be foul weather ahead for us."

"Yes, I've felt it coming for two or three days," returned Shull. "Look there—there go two more!"

Two of the workmen of his gang, who had watched the flight of their companion and who had been talking together for the few minutes since then, now threw down their shovels and left the mill. Little work was being done by those that remained.

"If you'd follow them," went on Shull, "you'd find them heading straight for The Morgue or the Bucket of Blood. They'll be beery-eyed drunk by noon and hang-

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ing about the gates trying to drag out more of this bunch."

The foreman went back to his work.

"We'll talk matters over at our noon meeting to-day and map out our campaign," said Goodlow to Castrow as he left the mill.

He walked hurriedly through the yard toward the exit leading to the office building. The boss roller of one of the rod mills came running to intercept him.

"Trouble, I suppose, Purdy?" he called as the roller came up.

"Trouble is right, Mr. Goodlow!" said Purdy. "Did you know that the mill was shut down last night for two hours because the billet handlers went out after beer? And I'm making more scrap this morning than I am rods. The mill looks like a barnful of wire hay. The Leaguers—"

"I know, I know, Purdy! I'm afraid we're in for a round of old-fashioned fun. I've been out of town for two days and have just learned of their new start. But I can't stop now. Be sure to come to the noon meeting to-day—we must get together on this."

And Goodlow went on.

He returned the greeting of his secretary as he passed through the latter's room on his way to his own office. The secretary followed him.

"Three of the League organizers were here just now," said Crittenden. "They were waiting when I came—said they wanted to see you. I told them you were coming through the mills this morning and that you might not reach your office for some time, but they sat here for nearly an hour. They left this letter and said they would be back."

Goodlow took the letter his secretary handed him, tore open the envelope and ran his eye over the typewritten sheet it contained.

"'Representatives of the labor of Steelburg Mills!'"

he read in an angry voice. "Yes, representatives of just about twenty-five per cent of the labor of Steelburg Mills—the cheapest, rottenest, bummiest labor we have! Who were those fellows, Crittenden? Have you ever seen any of them before? Did they look like workingmen?"

"Decidedly not! They don't belong in Steelburg—they're outsiders."

"Of course they are! Crittenden, I'm not going to see them! There's nothing I care to talk with them about! We'll keep them out of this office—we'll lock that door and I'll use your entrance. But if any of the mill workers come I want to see them. If I'm out in the mill and they should come send a messenger to hunt me up and I'll hurry over. I'll answer this letter and you can hand my reply to these fellows when they come back. Tell them, if they insist on seeing me, that I'm too busy. And that will be the truth, Crittenden—I'd be too busy to see that crowd if I wasn't doing anything more than scratching my ear."

Crittenden smiled and went out. Goodlow sat down at his desk and looked over his mail, which was piled high as a result of two days of accumulating. He buzzed for a stenographer and for more than an hour dictated steadily. The last letter he dictated was addressed to the organizers of the League of Steel Workers, who had called to see him. It contained but a half dozen lines.

One of the letters he wrote was to the president of the company that owned and operated Steelburg Mills, in which among many other things of import there was a suggestion that a meeting of the board of directors be called to consider the erection of two new blast furnaces, the securing control of all the property in Vinegar Gully and the obtaining from the city of an order for the vacation of the street which ran through the Gully, the ground to be used as a site for the two proposed furnaces.

When the stenographer had gone Goodlow lighted a cigar and for some time sat smoking and gazing out of the window. He had been expecting the reappearance of the

trouble that was now confronting Steelburg Mills. A year before it had flared up for a few days, a week, when a number of agitators had come to Steelburg and effected an organization of some of the mill workmen, which they called the League of Steel Workers. The work actually accomplished by the organizers of the League had fallen far short of their aims, but the seeds of unrest and dissatisfaction had been sown and the agitators had gone away not disheartened, promising to return and bring their work to completion. Now they were back, stronger in numbers, stronger in financial means with which to carry on their campaign, more determined than ever, and results of their new efforts were making their appearance quickly.

Goodlow sighed. He dreaded the days—perhaps the weeks—that lay just ahead, with all the disagreeable experiences they would bring to him. He knew he would be called on again and again to render unpleasant decisions, that he would be compelled to argue, to dispute, to cajole, to threaten. He knew he would have to behold vicious sights—men beaten and bruised and bleeding; men crazed with drink and foul and filthy; men wild-eyed with rage, unreasonable in their anger; men snarling and howling like wild animals. He knew he would see men—the men who would stand by him—worked to the point of exhaustion and collapse, and he knew that some of these, men of great qualities, would go away not to return, broken by the strain to which they had been subjected, disgusted and sickened by the sights they had witnessed. In his mind's eye he saw all the ugly miserable, wretched scenes about to be beheld in and about Steelburg Mills if the League should grow strong, grow stronger, become powerful. For Goodlow was an old mill man and more than once had he been through the experiences into which he was now about to enter again.

He rose and began pacing up and down the room and again he sighed. It would have to be. As well pull the furnace fires, stop the engines, shut down the mills and

close the gates as to surrender to this crowd of interlopers; to take dictation from these soft-handed, whisky-oozing outsiders who came from no one knew where; to have them say: "This man shall work here and in no other place; that man shall work there and in no other place!" To have them say: "This man, though we know he is more incompetent than that man, shall receive the same wage as the competent one!" To have them say: "We—we shall determine what hours the men of Steelburg Mills shall work, what maximum tonnages they shall produce, what they shall be paid for their labor!"

"Not more than twenty-five per cent of them!" he muttered as he walked back and forth. "But once that twenty-five per cent is organized, properly soused with bad whisky and started on their dirty work, another twenty-five per cent—the timid ones—will be missing."

To keep the gates open, the Bessemers blowing, part of the mills running, a number of the furnaces lighted up and making iron and steel for a week, two weeks, three weeks—whatever the time might be—to keep the pillar of fire above Steelburg by night, the cloud of smoke by day—that was what Goodlow hoped to be able to do, believed he would be able to do.

There was hard work ahead of him. He wished now that he had an assistant manager. He had never filled Lafayette Murdock's place. He had intended filling it, had intended finding a man all along, but he had delayed, put it off. His own capacity for work was so great that he had never felt any real need for an assistant. But now with all this trouble staring him in the face he realized he should have filled that vacancy.

Once he had gone to Pittsburgh to get a man, a man with whom he had worked years before, but he had returned without him. Then he had decided he would give the place to Manning, but Manning's health began to fail, grew steadily worse, and Manning had resigned and gone away.

He walked to a door, threw it open and stepped into

an empty room adjoining his. It was the office of the assistant general manager. It had not been occupied since Lafayette Murdock had left. It was dusty in there now and close-smelling. A big mahogany desk stood in one corner of the room and he walked to it and drew his finger a half dozen times over its dusty top.

"You've got to get a man in here," he told himself. "I believe I'll write to Manning and tell him what we're up against, and ask him to come and help us out for a few weeks. He'll be of great assistance to me, though what I need is a man who can fairly eat up work. Manning is rather slow, but I'll ask him to come—there's no one else just now."

He returned to his desk and wrote a letter to Manning. In three days he had Manning's reply saying he could not come.

The following morning saw more unrolled steel piled in the stock yard, more wrecked and derailed cars here and there about the yards: Purdy's rod mill was still more cluttered up with tangled rods and scrap and cobbles; a half dozen of the smaller furnaces were idle; the Bessemer was choked with all kinds of mill débris, and a great crowd of men hung about each gate, hooting and yelling and threatening the watchmen and guards and the men who were on their way to and from work.

Two days more and Goodlow's estimate of a first loss of twenty-five per cent of his employees had been passed—already the timid ones of the mills were dropping out. More stacks were smokeless, more furnaces idle and the fall in production tonnages in every department was so marked that a shipping clerk left his desk and his work in the middle of the afternoon and hurried across the yard to the office of Mr. Abel Eechy, a steam boss, to comment on the situation.

"What d'ye know about it, Mr. Eechy?" inquired the shipping clerk as he turned Mr. Eechy's galvanized wash bucket upside down and took a seat thereon. "Isn't it so? It's a bum blizzard that blows nobody some good.

If production tonnages keep coasting down, coasting down, coasting down, Mr. Eechy, round this old dump, I'll get caught up with my work. I'm not more than six days behind now. It does look like the Leaguers are loping to liberty or death, doesn't it? Let me see—you never flirt with Lady Nicotine, do you, Mr. Eechy? I thought not. Too bad. But maybe I can scrape up a few crumbs of comfort from one of my pockets.

"Well, Mr. Eechy, what d'ye know about it? They hauled Fred Skinner home this morning with a leaking roof. Fred came to work and some of these uplifters of labor that were waiting at the gate told him not to go in. Fred didn't say a word—he just put his thumb to the end of his beak, twiddled his fingers like he was playing Dixie on a flute and walked on. That's Fred. The uplifters went for him and got him, but not before Fred got three of them. From what I hear, Fred was loaded for brown, black, white, grizzly and Teddy bear. What d'ye know about that, Mr. Eechy?

"A nifty little mix that was over at the Bessemer last night. They caught some Polacks and Russians trying to wreck one of the blowing engines. There was a scrap royal but nobody hurt except Joe Bender—he had the pipe stem of his pipe shoved up through the roof of his mouth into his Eustachian tube, as we used to call it in the physiology class. What d'ye know about that? Well, I'll be dogged! You don't happen to have an ear spoon about you, do you, Mr. Eechy? There's some kind of an animal strolling about in my ear. Thanks.

"Well, as I said before, Mr. Eechy, it's a great old world we live in. Now this strike—but you can't call it a strike, Mr. Eechy! It isn't a strike—it's simply a hell-raising ruckus, with headquarters of the ruc-cusses established at the boozeries of Eddie Cockshot and Mike Conway. Eliminate those two cesspools of sin, Mr. Eechy, and this so-called strike will die like an unwatered fish. If you could build a barbed-wire fence across the south end of Vinegar Gully this afternoon, Mr. Eechy—close it

p tight, you understand—I'd be billing out steel products with both hands and both feet before to-morrow night, and instead of being six days behind in my clerical chores 'd be nine. What d'ye know about it?

"And isn't the company wise to the strategical value of the Gully? The answer is yea, yea, Mr. Eechy. Messrs. Hackberry and Clybo, the company's attorneys, paid a visit to the Gully yesterday. Messrs. Cockshot and Conway are noising it about that the aforesaid gents offered them the last price they had put on the Gully property. They turned them down. Messrs. Hackberry and Clybo raised their bid—twice. Messrs. Cockshot and Conway laughed at them, told them they had decided not to sell at any price. Can you beat it, Mr. Eechy? But regarding the affair logically, Messrs. Cockshot and Conway are wise, for if the Leaguers win out in this fight The Morgue and The Bucket of Blood will pay better dividends than any two South African diamond mines you could name, or then the can will be rushed in these mills night and day. That's one of the demands of these upifters of labor—unlimited booze for the boys of brawn.

"Eddie and Mike own every foot of the Gully property now with the exception of Wally Gay's old shack. They've tried to buy that several times, I've heard, but Wally won't sell. What he wants to hold on to that old dump for nobody knows. That old fat slob of a Telleriskiy was the duck that let Cockshot and Conway get the ulge on the company. The company could have bought up the Gully once for a song and a dance and then squeezed out Eddie and Mike. Now they can't and they need that property, too, if they ever expect to build more blast furnaces.

"And say, Mr. Eechy, what d'ye know about it? I was standing down here at the tower by the cross-over yesterday evening and a Midline passenger going west slowed down there. Who do you suppose, Mr. Eechy, was standing on the back platform of the last Pullman? Wally Gay! What d'ye know about that? Big as life,

Mr. Eechy, and twice as natural. I want to tell you right here, Mr. Eechy, that he didn't much resemble the dirty wop that used to clean out sewers and fly-wheel pits in this plant.

"Hello!" said he.

"Hello!" said I, and he was gone.

"What d'ye know about that, Mr. Eechy?

"Wally's been gone away from Steelburg for a long while. If he's been going to school all this time and if he's been working at his studies as he always worked at everything else he undertook to do I'd say that by now, Mr. Eechy, he ought to be able to spell "cat" easy.

"Isn't it so, though? The Old Man would smile if he could have Wally here to help settle this rumpus. It's going to worry the Old Man, Mr. Eechy—it's worrying him already. He's not as juvenilish as you and I are. I'm surprised that Wally didn't stop off and see some of us old-timers who helped him along in his upward climb. You know, I was the lad who discovered Wally Gay, Mr. Eechy. Oh, yes, I found out that Wally was there with chimes when it came to figures and a pen dipped in the ink, while everybody else was regarding him merely as a hammer-headed Vinegar-Gully dub. What d'ye know about that?

"But lend me your ear, Mr. Eechy. Between you and me and the pigpen gate, the reason he didn't stop off in Steelburg is this: He was bee-lining it to a little lady out in the West somewhere. He's going to marry her. Old Major Fronk tipped me off to the facts. He met her out there that time he got locked up in a car of wire here in the mill yard and didn't get out of the car until he arrived at the hamlet where she lived—out in Dakota or some other State. Oh, sure, Legget and Morehouse, the contractors, are building him a house up on Pine Street—I guess it's about finished by this time. Major Fronk is watching its erection with the eye of a baldheaded eagle. One of the carpenters told me that if he sees a nail driven crooked he howls bloody murder until it is

pulled out and driven straight. What d'ye know about it? We'll see Wally walking in on us one of these days.

"Well, Mr. Eechy, by the time I get washed up and my hair combed it will be near enough quitting time to quit. I'm going out through the tunnel under the Midline this evening—not so many of these uplifters of labor out there. And say, I've evolved a clever little safety-first device, Mr. Eechy, that isn't one-third bad. It is a shock absorber for the coco to be worn while these uplifters of labor are busy in their humanitarian work. It consists simply of a bag of sawdust which fits snugly in the top of my katy. If an uplifter of labor bashes me on the bean the bag of sawdust lessens the effect of the bash. Pretty cute, eh, Mr. Eechy? I'm tender on top of the head—can't stand much concussion. It dates back to youthful days. At school in my old-home town—Honeyburg on the White Fork, Mr. Eechy—one of my school teachers was always banging me on the nut with a hard maple ruler he carried as he would stroll about the room. He softened something up there and it's been soft ever since. What d'ye know about that?

"Good night, Mr. Eechy. And when you go out or come in the gate while the uplifters of labor are busy keep your eyes in high gear. You can't tell when one of the uplifters is going to start tampering with your health."

CHAPTER XVI

THE KEY MAN

GOODLOW had not been home for more than a week. He had had a cot placed in the room adjoining his office and the few hours of sleep he managed to get in the twenty-four-hour day he was on duty were caught there in the vacant office of the assistant general manager. The strain was telling on him. His face was haggard and gray, his hands trembled and he was in a constant state of nervous unrest. His clothes were wrinkled and soiled, red with ore dust, yellow with daubs of clay, black with grease spots, for wherever men were at work about the mills and yards Goodlow was to be found at some time in the twenty-four hours of the day, working with the men when help was needed, cheering them on, leading in the heave-ho-ing, urging them to stick it through the double-duty period that was on them and ahead of them.

At all hours of the day and of the night he was to be seen about the great plant. Often in the small miserable hours of the morning, in that hard killing portion of the night shift when men grow weak and weary, he would be on the blower's platform at one of the Bessemer's, working the shining levers, watching through colored glasses the flickering flames at the converter's mouth. For Goodlow was an old steel blower—the blower's platform had been one of the steps of his upward climb.

Not infrequently he would make sudden appearance in a crowd of heaving, tugging, sweating men in one of the mills as they labored at changing a roll or straightening out a twisted bar or hauling away a glowing cobble,

where he would lay his strength with theirs and heave and tug and sweat with them.

Nor was he the only one of the heads of Steelburg Mills that worked in this way, nor was he the only one of them staying at the mills twenty-four hours of every day. There were cots in every room of the big main-office building and there were cots in every little office about the mill-yards, and foremen and subforemen, superintendents and assistant superintendents and engineers and inspectors and clerks were giving their whole time, using their every atom of strength, trying to keep Steelburg Mills running, trying to keep afire that pillar of fire that hovered over the mills by night, trying to prevent from floating away that cloud of smoke that hung over them by day.

But the pillar of fire was not so bright now nor the cloud of smoke so black and dense, for from more furnaces the fires had been drawn, more mills had closed down, more engines had ceased to run, more boilers to steam. The complement of men necessary to keep Steelburg Mills open and alive was dangerously threatened. The second twenty-five per cent—the timid ones whom Goodlow had counted to lose—had quickly disappeared and heavy inroads had been made into the number he had counted to hold. Fear had entered their ranks, for the Leaguers, emboldened by their successes, were resorting to stronger means of intimidation. Men had been beaten at the gates; men had been grievously injured at the gates; men had been killed at the gates.

More days of twenty-four hours each and no signs of improvement. Another blast furnace was blown out and that followed quickly by another. There was mighty cheering in the Gully before the Leaguers' headquarters when the news came there. But hot metal continued to roll into Steelburg Mills from Ferro Junction, and Stanley Kirk, owner and operator of the four furnaces there, offered to deliver his entire output to the mills and did begin making such delivery. Then the Leaguers moved

to organize the men at the Ferro Junction furnaces. Without the hot metal from Kirk's furnaces Steelburg Mills could not continue to run.

"What d'ye know about that, Mack?" demanded a shipping clerk, thrusting his head in at the open window of Yardmaster McNutt's office. McNutt's feet were not on top of his desk, as they usually were. His arms were spread out on a table standing near the desk and his face was buried in his sleeves. McNutt was at the point of breaking down, for the Leaguers had taken from him man after man and he was working hard, hard, hard, to keep things moving, climbing up and down cars and setting and loosening brakes, coupling and uncoupling, throwing switches, putting derailed cars back on track, running about the yards from morning till night. And McNutt was growing old. It was a tired and worn and haggard face that looked up at the sound of the voice at the window.

"What d'ye know about that?" repeated the shipping clerk, and he held up for inspection two very dirty hands in the palms of which showed great water blisters, some of them broken, with the raw flesh peeping through the slotted skin. "They were stuck for limestone over at the Open Hearth and I lammed in and unloaded a half car-load of the stuff for them. I'll be dogged, Mack, if I don't feel like Jack Johnson had been using me for a punching bag, danged if I don't! My vertebræ squeak every time I stoop over. Listen! Didn't you hear it then? What d'ye know about that, Mack?

"Well, Mack, things look blue, blue—blooming blue, don't they? And they're going bluer. Indigo in a few more days, Mack. Devil Daggy quit last night and took about twenty with him. Goodlow was counting strong on him. That means the billet mill goes down. Say, Mack, d'ye know what this stir off makes me think of? A great big arch with the keystone busted and slipping out of place. Goodlow's busted, Mack—he's all in, he's done. The arch needs a new key and that darned quick. Good-

low is all right ; he's all there as an Old Man, but between you and me and the goose pond, Mack, he isn't quite big enough to cut this particular cheese, for it is a tough cheese—you know that. Well, I must amble on. My burnsides, mustache and goatee—if I ever grow the ornaments—will all be gray before I ever get caught up with my work now. What d'ye know about it?"

In the evening of that same day Wally Gay sat looking out of a car window of a Midline passenger train pulling slowly through Steelburg.

"That's the old place over there, Amy," he said to a happy-faced young woman occupying the seat opposite his. "That second tall stack right yonder is near the spot where you met me that night. Vinegar Gully lies over yonder and our new house in that direction, a half mile or so distant. Just about here the train stopped that night I came back from the West to Steelburg."

His face was close to the window and his eyes searched out every known stack and furnace and mill building.

"Something's wrong!" he exclaimed. "I never saw the mills so quiet. Those blast furnaces are down—either banked or blown out—and half the smoke stacks all over the plant are cold. I wonder what it is? I haven't heard of any trouble—though I haven't looked at a paper for a week."

The train moved slowly on—it was approaching a railroad crossing. One of the mill-yard gates came in sight. A great crowd of men was gathered in the street in front of it. The double gates swung open and he saw a throng of workmen coming out—it was the day gang going off shift. The crowd outside surged forward to meet them and he saw clubs shaken, and men were gathering stones from the street. Then the scene passed from his sight as the train ran behind a high wall.

"Amy, I want to get off at the tower down here and go back to the mills. There's something wrong there and I may be of service to Goodlow. You won't mind traveling on to the city and going to the hotel alone, will you?"

Surprise showed in the young woman's face; a shadow crossed it and lingered there for a moment. Then she smiled.

"You know what is best, Wally," she said. "Of course I can go on alone. But you'll be down soon, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'll just have a little talk with Goodlow, if he's at the mills—and he's there, I know that—and find out whether I can be of any assistance to him. It looks like a strike, though I can't imagine what they could be striking about. Get a cab at the depot, have a porter load the luggage and go to the Weston Hotel. If I'm delayed here longer than I expect to be I shall telephone you. Good-by, dear."

He stooped and kissed her and hurried out of the car and as it came to a stop at the crossing tower a moment later he swung down to the ground and went running back along the tracks.

The crowds about the gate entrance had thinned—the workmen from the mills had fought their way through the Leaguers and gone and only the Leaguers remained. Wally had come up and passed in among them before he was recognized.

"Wally Gay!" a voice shouted.

"Hello, Wally! Ah, there, Wally! Hello, old horse!"

The greetings came thick and fast and in a few minutes he was busy shaking hands, for he knew a large number of the men gathering about him—with some of them he had worked many a long hard turn in the mills.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Strike! Strike!" shouted a dozen voices.

"A strike? What kind of a strike? What about? I'm a member of the old mill union and I'm in good standing too—my dues are paid up. Maybe I ought to be in this strike."

"Sure you ought, Wally. But it isn't the old mill union's strike," said Joe Blakely, a gas-house man, who made it clear he was ready to become spokesman for the crowd. "That mill union is nothing but an old woman's

tea party, Wally. This is something else, something bigger."

"Tell me all about it, Joe. What are you striking for?"

"Oh, everything—wages, hours, better treatment,
—representation, beer—"

"Beer? That's nice! Who's your head?"

"Why, there's two or three of 'em. I don't remember
—hey, Bull, what's them fellers' names—them organ-
izers?"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" broke in Wally. "Outsiders, men
you don't know, men you never saw or heard of before,
men who never worked with you or with anybody else
probably—they're your leaders, are they? You're a
brainy bunch, Joe! How much have your organizers
taxed you so far in this game?"

"Well, we've paid in five dollars a head, but you under-
stand that—"

"Easy money for your organizers! You certainly are
a brainy bunch! Oh, you simps, you suckers, you marks
—you make me laugh! I want to tell you, Joe—and you
other fellows, that you are in a pretty dirty business! I
heard all about your League last year and I've seen some-
thing of its work in the East. In a month from now
you'll be so disgusted with yourselves that you hooked
up with this gang of floating thugs and took your orders
from them that you'll deny, every one of you, that you
ever stood here at this gate trying to prevent decent men
from earning a living! If this was a strike of the old
mill union and your demands were just I'd go in with you
and help you win your fight, but I'll have nothing to do
with your League! The old mill union always has
handled the labor disputes here and it always will. Your
League will lose out—it's too rotten to win!"

He pushed through the circle of men about him and
walked toward the gate.

"Don't you go in there!" some one yelled.

Wally whirled about.

"Who tells me not to go in there?" he demanded, walk-

ing back toward the crowd. "Which one of you? Come out here and try to keep me from going in there!"

There was no answer to his challenge, no movement of any one to come forward, and he turned and went on to the gate where he beat and kicked against the boards until the face of a watchman appeared at a hole. The gate rolled back and he stepped inside. A half dozen of the guards came up to greet him and from them he had a short account of the trouble.

He walked across the yard to the Open Hearth, climbed the iron stairway and went along the floor in front of the long row of furnaces. Some of them, he noticed, were cold and black and the plant, he could see at his first glance, was in a sad state of neglect. He saw a foreman coming toward him, one he had worked with. The man's face showed worn and tired and it was ugly with a beard of many days' growth. He walked wearily and unsteadily.

"Hello there, Frank!" called Wally.

The foreman stopped.

"Is—is it you?" he asked.

He put out a hand that seemed all but lifeless, that shook and was without grip, and then turned and sat down heavily on a bench. Wally looked curiously at him.

"What's the matter with you, Frank?" he queried.

"Done up—down and out from overwork! I haven't slept for nearly forty-eight hours and I've been on my feet practically all the time. I've simply got to throw up my hands and quit, that's all there is to it. I hate to drop out, but I can't go on any longer. And they're all just about in my fix—I mean the superintendents and foremen."

"Get to the office, Frank, and flop. Come on, right now. Forget everything! I'll take care of your job to-night and to-morrow, too, if you haven't caught up by morning."

They went to the office. The foreman threw himself

upon a cot and in a minute was breathing heavily. Wally found a suit of overalls in the man's locker and put them on. He went out to the floor. Word that he had come back had passed from lip to lip and the old men of the plant, the men with whom he had once sledged and barred and sweat before the red furnaces, came crowding about him to shake his hand.

"My furnace is ready to tap, Wally," shouted one of them as he came up.

"All right, Blacky, here we go!" he laughed.

And he went to the furnace, thrust a test bar into the white lake of fire, found the temperature right and took out the heat.

"Slick as a whistle!" chuckled Blacky to his helper.

All through the night he worked before the glowing furnaces, helping the furnace men, toiling with the short-handed crew of laborers, giving a lift here, a hand there, tapping steel, watching the heats poured, jollying and joshing the tired gangs. Once he came on two men sneaking through the building behind the furnaces, evidently bent on mischief. He stopped them, came to blows with them and knocked one of them down a stairway. The other he caught, threw down and sat on until the guards came.

By morning the palms of his hands were covered with blisters and his face was red and chafed where the fierce heat from the furnaces had beat upon it. His skin was soft, but his muscles were hard, hard as gristle, for he had not been training his mind wholly to the neglect of his body while he had been absent from Steelburg. Constant gymnasium practice had kept him fit and in condition, and now after a long night of grilling and straining and tugging and hauling he felt none the worse for it, except as his hands, blistered and tortured by the rough handles of the tools he had used, hurt him.

At daybreak the foreman came out of the office yawning and stretching.

"I didn't miss a wink," he said, laughing. "I feel like

a million dollars. Now I'm ready for another twenty-four-hour stretch or a thirty-six if it's necessary. Say, I forgot to tell you that there would be lunch brought here at midnight. Did you see anything of it?"

"I certainly did," replied Wally. "I ate it all—there's nothing left for your breakfast. Call up the cook. I feel as if I were good for a twenty-four-hour go, too. If you're ready to take charge I'll saunter down through the yard and see where I'm most needed."

He left the Open Hearth without changing his clothes or washing his grimy face. The spectacle that met his eyes as he walked through the yard caused him to groan, remembering the clean and shipshape condition of everything when he was last there. Spilled materials of a hundred kinds lay along the broad-gauge tracks, with here and there a wrecked or derailed car blocking the ways; buggies, molds, stools, ingots lay scattered about the stripping houses and soaking pits; scrap, broken machinery, bent bars, twisted cobbles—mill débris of every imaginable sort was before him wherever he looked.

"It will take a year to get things cleaned up again!" he muttered.

As he stepped into the Bessemer building he saw Goodlow coming. He was shocked at the appearance of the general manager. He had aged—it seemed to him—twenty years since he had seen him last. He stopped and waited. Goodlow came on, glanced at him, failed to recognize him, seeing in him one of the mills' dirty workmen, and went on.

"Good morning!" called Wally.

Goodlow stopped and looked back.

"You son of a gun! Oh, you son of a gun! Where in Sam Hill did you come from?"

And he came hurrying back, his hand outstretched, his gray face illumined by a smile of happiness.

"Dropped from the clouds."

"Well, drop again—drop down here on this buggy

and let's talk! Let's talk till the cows come home! By gee whiz, Wally, I'm glad to see you!"

They sat down on a derailed buggy at the side of the narrow-gauge tracks and Wally listened to the history of the fight the mills were making against the Leaguers; answered a hundred questions Goodlow put to him, then listened to more history.

"But I'm afraid they've got us, Wally," said Goodlow with a sigh as he neared the finish of his long story. "From the very first they have drawn heavily from the number I was counting on to stand by us, far more heavily than I ever dreamed they would. Devil Daggy was a big loss to us—he has a gang of admirers that will go where he goes and stay where he stays. And to make matters worse, early last night the big sewer back of the rod mill got choked—somebody threw something into that catch basin. The water is piling up all over that part of the plant. It will soon put the bar mill and Purdy's mill out of commission, and a few hours more will see the power house down. Then we'll quit. There isn't anybody to send up there that can open up that sewer. Ackerman might, but he went two days ago, saying it was worth his life to stay here longer."

Wally rose to his feet.

"I'll go and open up the sewer," he said.

"Oh, no, Wally!"

"Oh, yes, but I will! I know all about that sewer—I've been down in there many a time. There's nothing to it if you know how. After I get that done I'll go up in the Gully and have a talk with Devil Daggy. He and I used to be hoodlums together up there."

"You stay out of Vinegar Gully!"

"Why?"

"Didn't you just tell me you had a wife waiting for you to come back to her—a wife you shamefully deserted before your honeymoon had ended? You want to go back to her, don't you? You stay out of Vinegar Gully!"

"Pshaw! I'm not afraid of Vinegar Gully. I was raised there, lived there for years, and I own property there—I have rights in the Gully."

"Stay out of the Gully, I tell you!"

"Well, let's get that sewer opened up. Are you going along?"

"Yes, I'll go with you. I think I can scare up two or three men to help you."

And a little later, down in the filthy, nasty, roiling water of a great catch basin, Wally Gay labored and sweat, cleaning it out, hauling and pulling at the obstructions that had been thrown into the basin, shoveling out the dirty sediment that had washed in—labored and sweat in the noisome hole just as he had labored and sweat there many a time before.

No one was there to see him finish his Augean task—Goodlow had been called away, and some one had come and taken his two laborers—when with a whining, sucking sound the water broke through the barrier that held it back and ripped and gurgled into the sewer below. He stood leaning on his shovel, watching it eddy and whirlpool about his legs, and he laughed aloud at the success of his labors.

In a near-by shanty he left the hip boots he had pulled on for the job, put on his shoes, and still covered with the filth and slime of the catch basin, walked across the yards to the gate that opened near the head of Vinegar Gully. He recalled Goodlow's warning—"Don't you go to the Gully!"—and he smiled. Why should he fear to venture into the Gully? He knew them all up there—they knew him. And he wanted to have a talk with Devil Daggy.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIGHT IN THE GULLY

NONE of the Leaguers was at the gate, but down the Gully in front of The Bucket of Blood Wally saw a crowd gathered and the sound of yelling and cheering came to his ears. He walked along the dirty cinder sidewalk toward the crowd. He came to the shack which he owned—the shack where he had been raised, where he had lived alone after old Joe Gay and Jane Gay had died. There he stopped.

It was a most disreputable-looking place. It was that when he had gone away from it a good many years ago, but now it was a hundred times worse. He saw the old "For Sale" sign which he had painted himself and which he had placed on the front of the building, now faded and battered and hanging awry. He had never come to take it down after he had decided not to sell the property. Cockshot and Conway had been to see him many times, trying to buy the little place, offering him far more than it was actually worth, but he had always refused to sell.

He went in and tried the door. Before his knee thrust it opened and he stepped inside. It was dark and gloomy in there in the little rooms beneath the low ceilings, but he noticed there were no signs of dampness; the tin roof he had helped old Joe Gay put on years before—a few months before old Joe had died—had held against rust and corrosion. Boys had broken into the place and wrought havoc with the interior. Pieces of broken chairs were scattered about, boards torn from the wainscoting, paper from the walls, bricks from a

chimney. But in his old bedroom he found intact the cot on which he had formerly slept, the cot on which he had lain awake so many nights staring up at the black ceiling, too tired, too exhausted from his killing labor at the mills to sleep. He sat down on it and sighed for he was now beginning to feel tired.

"I wonder what Amy will think of me," he mused—"my leaving her in such a heartless manner for so long? There were tears in her voice both times I talked to her over the phone last night. It's too bad—but I know she understands. I must dress up and go down to the city just as soon as I get back to the Open Hearth."

He rested a few minutes longer, caught himself falling into a doze, and rose and went out into the street.

The gathering of men in front of The Bucket of Blood was scattering, with some of them coming back toward the gate. Wally met these. Many of them knew him and began speaking to him, some of them stopping to shake hands with him. Then a man larger than the others, taller by a head, a man coarse of features and brutal in his whole make-up, came along.

"Hello, Devil Daggy!" shouted Wally.

The man did not return the greeting. He stared for a moment or two, then asked harshly, "What're you doin' in the Gully?"

"Oh, taking a look at my real estate," laughed Wally.

"What're you doin' in the Gully?" repeated the man.

"Well, if you're bound to know, Devil, I came here to have a talk with you."

"What've you got to talk with me about? Say, why don't you run with your own crowd? If you're hooked up with the high-hat bunch, and I know you are, the Gully ain't a safe place for you and your kind these days!"

"Is that so? You don't say so! Devil, I've been in this Gully nearly—not quite—as much as you have, and I've always found it safe enough for me. There isn't a man in this crowd or in the whole Gully I know

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and who knows me that I believe I have any cause to fear. There may be some here now who would stick me in the back if they had the chance, but they're not Gully men."

"You've been workin' up there in the mills, haven't you?" roared the big man, coming closer. "You've been there this mornin'!"

"Say, Devil, chase some of that noise out of your voice!" said Wally sharply. "You know I'm not hard of hearing, and if you think you're scaring me—forget it!"

Daggy broke out into loud and abusive talk. The language of the Gully ran trippingly on his tongue and with unpremeditated art he poured forth the ugly oaths and foul obscenities, the vile profanities and strange blasphemies and maledictions that were peculiarly the Gully's own.

Unperturbed Wally listened until he made a pause, then spoke quickly.

"Devil, I came up here to have a decent talk with you—man to man. You don't want it. All right. But now let me tell you something, Devil: You could have kept all your threats, your cuss words and your rotten talk in your rotten mouth and I would have been just as much frightened, just as much afraid of you and the Gully as I am this minute! For I know you and I know the Gully! I've fought with you in the Gully, Devil, and I've licked you and I can lick you again! And I'll fight you again, right now, right here, if you'll agree to the stakes I propose."

"What are they?" demanded Daggy.

"This: I'll fight you to see whether you go back to the mills or whether I stay out of the mills. If I win you're to go back to work and stay at work and you're to take your gang with you. If you win I'm to stay away from the mills until this trouble is settled. Now take me up or sneak!"

"It's a go!" laughed Daggy. "I should say it is a go!"

Cheers, whoops and yells greeted the announcement and a ring was quickly formed.

"There's two pairs of light gloves at The Morgue!" shouted an elderly man whom those about him had been addressing as Duckbill. "Wait and I'll get 'em!"

"Never mind the gloves, Duckbill—I want no gloves!" called Wally. "But you might fetch a pail of water if you feel like it."

"Sure thing, Wally, surest thing!" And Duckbill hurried off.

There were those in the crowd surrounding the two men who smiled as they looked at Wally's soft white skin; and there were those there who chuckled and nodded their heads wisely as they looked at certain knots and lumps and cords crawling and playing about on his arms and shoulders beneath the thin gauze undershirt he wore—for he had pulled off the blue jumper and the white shirt beneath it and cast them aside. And when they had studied the fine lines and perfect symmetry of his figure they nodded their heads wisely again.

One of those who smiled as he looked at that soft white skin was Devil Daggy.

"I hate to do it, Bulger!" he whispered to Bulger the Bat, who stood near him. "It'll be like taking pennies from a blind man without arms!"

Bulger the Bat made no reply—he had been looking at those lumpy muscles crawling about on Wally's arms and shoulders.

"Yeow-ow-ow!"

The fight was on—the first blow had been struck. It had fallen on Wally—a glancing blow on the face, and blood oozed from a hundred little capillaries and veins that had been broken.

"Yeow-ow-ow-ow!"

The second blow had been struck—and Devil Daggy staggered back with a grunt.

It was an old-fashioned Gully fight, the kind of fight

the Gully delighted in, brutal and cruel; the kind of fight the Gully gloated over, bloody and wicked; the kind of fight the Gully declared was the only fight worth looking at—fought without gloves, fought without pre-arrangement, fought without nice regards to the rules of the ring, fought for something bigger than money stakes, fought to a finish!

Wally Gay understood the task that was before him. More than once in earlier years he had tested Devil Daggy's strength and he knew it was greater than his own; he knew he should not dare risk his power of muscle against the power of muscle of the giant before him. If he was to win he must win by skill, by the skill he had gained in the gymnasium at the hands of his boxing master; he must avoid Daggy's terrific lunges, his sledge-hammer blows, his clinches, his bear hugs.

So he danced lightly about his slow-moving, bulky opponent, stooping and retreating, ducking and bending and twisting, darting in at an unguarded moment to plant a blow, slipping aside to escape return punishment. But not always with complete success, for time and again the hard black fists of Devil Daggy found their mark, and because of his soft white skin, Wally soon presented a sickening sight. And those who had looked only at that soft white skin howled in ghoulish glee, but those who had watched the lumpy muscles bulging the thin shirt continued to shake wise heads.

"It's few pennies he'll pick off'n that blind man!" muttered Bulger the Bat.

Once as a smashing blow from the giant's fist caught him on the jaw and Wally went staggering back against the ring of men, a foot shot out and kicked him on the ankle. Instantly there came the sound of a blow, of clenched fist on flesh, followed by a howl of pain.

"Fair play here!" yelled a voice. And a dozen voices took up the cry, "Fair play! Fair play!"

Devil Daggy had seen the kick delivered and at once he had turned and walked back to his side of the ring

... and it was being fought to a fini.

What the Gully did not like about the fight that was to go down in G's greatest fight ever witnessed in the G's duration—it didn't last half as long as he had wished. And another thing the G's about the fight that day was that there was no forewarning of its sudden termination. plainingly stated: "One second we were loo-loo of a fight; the next second we were not even thinking of a fight at all!"

For the ring of howling, yelling, gloating had seen Wally reeling beneath two a' Devil Daggy's black fists; they had seen him believed, going groggy; they had seen Devil Daggy driving at him, seen him strike, seen him swerve and then seen him go crashing through the ropes. Wally had so quickly delivered the blow that he had failed to catch it.

Bulger the Bat stooped over the fallen Wally and began to count, counted to five and quit.

"Y' could count a hundred and twenty, still be layin' there sleepin'!" he snarled and walked away.

Devil lumbered heavily forward. Wally rose from the ground of slag and cinder where he had been lying.

"Shake hands, Wally! You done it, all right! Say, what kind of a horizontal pile driver have you got up your sleeve anyhow?"

"The same kind you carry, I think, Devil," replied Wally, trying to smile but failing completely.

Devil Daggy chuckled.

"You win, Wally, you win! And I'll stick to the agreement. I'll go back, but I can't go to-day. Tell Hornsby that me and the gang'll be on hand to-morrow mornin', and if he's in any kind of shape we can start the old mill up again. Just now I'm goin' home to flop."

"I'll tell Hornsby, Devil. And I think I'll go up to my shack and do a little flopping myself. Glad I never sold my real estate in the Gully—it comes in mighty convenient to-day."

"I'll go 'long with you," said Duckbill, and he took Wally's arm.

After he had rested a long while on the old cot in his little bedroom, and after he had—with the assistance of Duckbill and three admiring young Gullyites who had followed him to the shack—removed as many of the marks of the battle as could there be removed, Wally announced he was ready to go back to the mills.

"And I'm goin' back too, derned if I ain't!" declared Duckbill. "I'm gettin' a little ancient, but I can help McNutt out in somethin' or other. I'm sick and tired of this flim-flam-flummery that's goin' on round here!"

"Me too!" came in a chorus from the three youngsters.

"That's the stuff, boys! We'll all go together!" said Wally, and they left the shack.

Out in the street in front of the shack a small crowd of men stood discussing the fight.

"Fall in, you fellows, if you're going to the mills with us!" called Wally.

Their talk suddenly ceased and they were silent for a few moments. Then they began whispering and six

of the men came forward. The others sneered and walked away.

"By golly—Ned, now I can go home to-night!" said one of the men as they moved toward the gate. "My old woman chased me outen the house with a club a week ago and I ain't been home since."

"I ain't had a square feed since this here rough-house started. I'm all caved in, I am!" groaned another.

"I wisht I had my five bucks back," sighed another.

Inside the gate the men scattered, each going to seek his old foreman, and Wally went on down through the yards alone. He saw Goodlow hurrying to meet him—word of the fight had come into the mills. The general manager was breathing heavily as he came up.

"Didn't I tell you to stay out of that Gully?" he demanded angrily.

"Yes, but I didn't mind," returned Wally. "I wish now I had."

"Haven't you any respect for yourself? Haven't you any consideration for your wife? You're a pretty looking thing now, I must say! I'm ashamed of you!"

"Rub it in, Mr. Goodlow, rub it in—I deserve it! I'm not a bit proud of my stunt—far from it. It was a silly thing to do, I know, but I went up there, intending to have a little talk with Devil Daggy and learn just how matters stood with him and his gang. I wanted to find out from him why he had held on here as long as he did and then went out so suddenly. I saw the Gully, I smelled the Gully, and the old Gully spirit seemed to flow back into me. Then Devil Daggy used some rotten talk; I got mad, fighting mad, and I—well, I just went in and whaled him. He's coming back tomorrow morning with his gang."

"Eh? What's that you say?"

"He'll be here, you may count on it. That's what we fought for—to see whether he would come back or whether I should stay out. And ten men came in with me just now."

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"Get down to the office, Wally, at once and I'll telephone to Doc Lampson to go over and patch you up. After he's through with you take that cot in the room next to my office and get a little sleep."

"I think I will. I'll be all right in a little while. Tomorrow, if you'll let me, I'll take on Ackerman's job. I used to be his roustabout, you know, and I'm acquainted with his work from A to Z. And I'm pretty sure I can rustle up a good-sized gang within the next two or three days."

"Don't ask me what job you can take, Wally—take any job you want! Take mine if you like! Now get out of my sight—you're as unbeautiful as a stuck hog!"

AMY GAY cried out in distress
 stood before her the following day,
she put her face against his shoulder,
And after she had dried her tears,
 listened to his humorous accounts of his experiences,
since he had left her on the train
 he told her he was going back.

He should not go! She would not let him go.
 She was wretched, miserable, lonely—
 there alone any longer!

"But down in the hotel parlor,
 you is somebody you know, some old friend,
 Who is it? I don't know a soul."
 "Come and see."

An old man came forward to meet them.
 He entered the parlor.

"It's Major Fronk!" cried Amy.
 She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

The major stammered, blushed,
 hid his red silk handkerchief and all
 quickly recovered his composure
 sofa where he sat down.

"You said the house was all ready, didn't you, major?" he asked.

"Built, finished, completed, Wally—completed to the last nail and screw and shingle, and completed right, for I saw to it. The decorators got through just a few days ago. All ready now for moving in the furniture."

"Then I want you to help Amy buy the furniture and have it moved in. Take her to all the furniture stores in the city, and don't hurry her, whatever you do. Get Mrs. Yates, our laundry woman, to go up to the house and help set things up and maybe you can find a man in the burg who will go up and work a day or so."

"Why, the idea, Wally!" cried Amy. "The very idea!"

"Quite the idea, my dear. We've already decided—you've already decided what we want, haven't you? So there's nothing to do now but to go and get it. I haven't time to help you—I don't know anything about such matters, anyway—and the major is an expert at that kind of business. Right now I ought to be out at the mills—and right now I'm going. Good-by, dear. Major, I leave her with you."

"Golly, I love that boy!" murmured the major, gazing after the retreating figure.

Amy Gay looked up at him and smiled; and her eyes were tear-dimmed.

Back at the mills Wally changed to old clothes and went out to take up Ackerman's duties—more than Ackerman's duties, for he worked with, as well as superintended, the men; shoveled and picked with them, heaved and tugged with them, lifted and carried with them, sweated with them. He found that three of Ackerman's foremen had stayed on, each having a small gang of laborers. Late in the afternoon he went to the Gully and brought in a dozen men whom he found willing to return to work. He passed them in at the gate and went back to the Gully—he might be able to pick up another man or two.

It was quiet there now, though gatherings of men were

The drinker strangled, sputter;
again and the bottle went flyin;
turned about with tears streaming

"Jogs-jolly!" he exclaimed. '
clean outen me!" Then he starte
wide. "Jogs-jolly, Nicker, if it ain

Wally went up and shook hand
"What do you two old devils
here to hit the bottle at such a tin
of you pensioners, drawing your pe
Don't you know there'll be no pen:
win out?"

"Jogs-jolly, Wally, ol' fellers lik
to have a drop now an' then to keep

"An' us not so peert as we used
Nicker.

"An' our blood thinnin' fast, Wall

"Dicker, you're an old soak! W
after Nicker? He's a moderate dri
six or eight drinks ahead of him!"

And Wally walked away, laughin'
The old men - - .

The crowd that had stood in front of The Bucket of Blood had moved away when Wally came back—it was now at the gate. He turned and went into the saloon. A good many years had elapsed since he had last entered the place. He found it unchanged—there was the same black, sticky floor; the big, tall, rusty stove; the faded whisky advertisements on the walls; the unpainted bar and the cracked mirror behind it, with the rows of long-necked bottles sitting in front of it; the old battered chairs and tables. The place was almost empty, there being only a few men in the room—a dozen or so—playing cards at the tables. A man was at work, stooping over, behind the bar.

"Hello, Eddie!"

Eddie Cockshot straightened up. He looked at Wally in surprise; he then quickly glanced toward one of the tables where four men sat playing cards.

"Don't you go startin' nothin' in here, Wally," he said in a low voice.

"Of course not! I'm not wishing to start anything anywhere. I just wanted to talk with you a few minutes."

"What're you goin' to have?"

"Keep it, Eddie—I'm off that stuff."

"You used to like to lap it up, all right."

"Oh, yes, I used to do a lot of crazy things. Say, Eddie, why don't you get out of here while the getting out is good?"

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"I mean that the League is going to lose, and you are, too, if you don't go from the Gully pretty quick."

"Oh, is that so?" sneered Cockshot. "Who told you all this stuff?"

"The League is going to lose!" repeated Wally. "And you are going to get squeezed. You've had a big offer, a bigger offer than you'll ever have again. Why don't you accept?"

"Are you pluggin' for the company?"

"I'm helping to fight the League. We're going to

that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"All of the Gully isn't yours, Eddie. Of property here and that little mine is going to be the fulcrum—i means—by which we will pry you

Cockshot stopped polishing the hand and looked at Wally.

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"Wait and see, Eddie. Only I don't wait and see. Get out while good."

"You might as well be goin', Wally. Your time and mine."

"I'm going."

And he went.

Devil Daggy had kept his word to work with his gang and the bill of fare. The huge ladles of hot furnaces continued to roll into Junction. Leaguers' attempts to organize the junction had signally failed. And three

stayed home at the first indications of trouble. And the pillar of fire over Steelburg Mills was growing brighter and the cloud of smoke denser and blacker.

Ackerman's big gangs of workmen under Wally's management were steadily increasing in size and efficiency and a semblance of order began to be noticeable throughout the dirty and cluttered yards. He had placed himself at the call of every department head, and night and day he was running here and there about the plant with his men, helping to keep things moving, helping to clean up spills and messes, helping to repair break-downs.

For there was trouble, much trouble yet to be combated—the League was still alive, active and malignant. There were mysterious breakages and stoppages and derailments and spills and tappings, for some of those who had come back had come not to work but to wreck. And crowds of Leaguers still gathered at the gates and cursed and threatened and threw stones and wielded clubs.

A dozen times a day Wally was at the gates, urging men to come in, arguing with the Leaguers, pleading with them. He was there against the wishes of Goodlow and against the advice of every department head, all of whom feared for his safety. But the Leaguers did him no harm. While they sometimes cursed him, threatened him, called him vicious names, they had not offered to injure him. He continued to go into Vinegar Gully, picking up a man now and then, sometimes two and three, and bringing them to the gate and passing them in. And it was on one of these trips late one afternoon when he found Jack Stickney, a shearman, at the farther end of the Gully.

"Walk back to the gate with me, Wally," said Stickney, "and I'll go in. I've got enough—it's a fizzle."

"Come along, Jack!"

And they went through the Gully side by side in the middle of the street.

They were in front of The Bucket of Blood when a

said to Duckbill, who with tv
moment. He dropped his han
men saw it was dripping scarlet.

Duckbill leaped forward and j

"Get to the 'phone at the gate
son, the company doctor! Hi
through the mills and find the
Get a move on you! Come on in

And he led the wounded man
sisted him to lie down on the cot

The roar of the big whistle t
the quitting hours in Steelburg M
boomed out every morning and eve
the strike of the Leaguers, was n
And every man coming out of the
knew the cause of its silence—W
Vinegar Gully. And those who
Gully on their way to their home
silence, the little shack where the
When they went past The Bucket
which he had been stricken dow
growled and cursed and shook th
wretched place.

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and went in and a moment later those who stood in the street heard the wail of a woman, grief-stricken and in despair. And Goodlow came out wiping his eyes and old Major Fronk followed, sobbing.

Wally Gay was dying in Vinegar Gully, but the mills did not stop. Over them that night the pillar of fire was brighter than it had been for many a night, and the grinding of wheels, the exhaust of mighty engines, the rumble of rolls was louder and steadier, and there was more steel blown and melted, tapped and poured and rolled and sheared and marked and loaded than there had been for many a night, for the League was going to pieces and the Leaguers were coming back to work.

"Is he dead yet?" asked the men coming in the next morning.

"Is he dead yet?" asked those going off shift—none of them omitting from their question that ominous last word. Those whose route lay through the Gully passed the little shack quietly, whispering if they talked, stepping lightly, holding their tin pails against their bodies that they might not rattle.

And well they needed to keep quiet thereabouts, for in front of the shack at the edge of the street sat a grim-faced white-haired old man, and a shotgun rested on his knees. Fastened to a post that stood near him was a broad board on which was painted in huge crude letters the word, "SILENCE." Two old men were hovering about him.

"Jogs-jolly, major," one of them whispered. "Nicker an' me can stay here all day an' all night, too!"

"No, you boys go home and get some sleep to-day and relieve me here to-night."

"All right, major, if you say so. Jogs-jolly—say, boys, we'll come loaded for anything!"

"Don't you come loaded with booze!" cautioned the major severely.

"No, no, no, no! Jogs-jolly, no, major! Not a drop!"

All day Major Fronk sat beneath the painted board with the shotgun lying on his knees, and all day the doctors came and went, but they gave out no word of encouragement. And the cloud of smoke above the mills that day was denser and blacker than it had been for many a day.

At nightfall came Nicker and Dicker and relieved the tired major. Dicker took the major's gun, but Nicker had brought his own weapon, an ancient horse pistol with a jammed cylinder.

"Would you take a pop at a feller, Dicker, if he started makin' noise out here?" whispered Nicker.

"Would I? I'd pop him quicker'n I'd pop a Si-ox Injun! Say, boys, watch me!"

But only once were they disturbed. That occurred when Bulger the Bat at the Morgue started to sing in his raucous, unmelodious voice—Maggie, the Cows are in the Clover.

"I'll get him! Watch me, Nicker!" whispered Dicker, rising and starting toward the Morgue. But the singing suddenly stopped and was not resumed, for a thrown beer bottle had caught the singer on the lip, cutting it in such a fashion that for the rest of his musical life Bulger the Bat's singing was always marred by a lisp.

Another day.

"Is he dead yet?"

No, not dead, but they still shook their heads—those doctors. And they dared not remove the injured man from the wretched hovel in which he lay. And again Major Fronk sat at his post all day. And the rumble of the mills was growing louder and louder and the smoke cloud blacker and blacker.

Another night, with Nicker and Dicker on duty, with men passing by in the darkness, stepping lightly, pausing to whisper, "Is he dead yet?" And the pillar of fire above the mills was brighter still and yellow tongues of flame were beginning to lick the tops of stacks long cold.

Then in the dusk of dawning, before men had begun asking, "Is he dead yet?" came rolling into the Gully a gray motor vehicle and a black cab, to stop in the street before the shack. And men went into the hovel and returned, bearing a litter on which lay a still form. And Goodlow came out with Amy Gay, helped her into the cab and stepped in and sat down beside her. Then the vehicles drove slowly away down the Gully, and Nicker and Dicker with uncovered heads stood watching them go.

"Well, Nicker, our work is did," said Dicker.

"It's did," returned Nicker.

They walked to the open door of the shack and peered in.

"Goin' in, Dicker?"

"Not me, Nicker, not me! Jogs-jolly, no, boys!"

They pulled the door shut and walked back to the sidewalk.

"Well, Dicker, I've just got to have a drop! I ain't had a drop for so long that I'm fair rustlin' inside like dry leaves."

"All right, Nicker, you go get your drop; but don't you go to the Bucket of Blood for that drop! Nor to the Morgue neither, Nicker!"

"No, Dicker, I'll trot over to the Turk's for my drop."

"An' I'll go up an' meet the boys comin' out an' tell 'em. You might mosey back this way when you've had your drop, Nicker, an' I'll meet you an' we'll go an' have another drop—maybe two."

The old men separated.

CHAPTER XIX

VINEGAR GULLY PASSES

THE van of the long line of dirty, grimy, tired-faced night workers pouring out of the gate nearest the Gully saw an old man standing by a telephone pole just outside the gate. In his right hand he held a shot-gun. His left arm, in which his face was hidden, rested against the pole. His body was shaken by sobs and those who came near him heard him moaning as he cried. A crowd circled about him.

"What is it, Dicker, what is it?" They asked.

"They come—they come an' got him—hauled him off in the dead wagon! The little woman was a-cryin' an' the Old Man was a-cryin' an' I'm a-cryin' too! They hauled him off in the dead wagon! Oh, dear!"

"He's dead!"

The word spread about the crowding, growing circle, leaped back along the moving line, jumped from lip to lip, ran in at the gate and flew down through the mill yards, darting here and there into every nook and corner where men worked.

"He's dead!"

Lines of men moving toward other gates suddenly swerved, changed their courses, and with accelerated speed rushed toward the Gully gate. Workmen just beginning their day's work left their levers and their motors and their cranes and their sledges and their furnaces; left the white dripping ingot hanging in the crane dogs; left the red bar lying at the shears' jaws; left the rod racing through the rolls to twist and tangle

and cobble; left the bubbling steel to pour out upon the ground, and with whatever tool they held in hand—sledge or ax or hammer or chisel or hook or bar or tongs—poured across the yards to the Gully gate, surged out into the Gully, crowded and milled about and pushed and swore, and then as at some prearranged plan rolled down the Gully, a black, rumbling, threatening mass, with Devil Daggy at their head.

Out of The Morgue rushed three men, out of The Bucket of Blood four, who fled away like animals hunted, looking not behind them as they fled. A fifth man appeared in the entrance to The Bucket of Blood. In one hand he carried a heavy bulging bag of black cloth. One glance at the onpouring wave of men he gave, then darted into the street. He tripped, stumbled and fell; the bag burst asunder and a shower of small coins—nickels and dimes and quarters—poured out of the rent and flew and skipped and rolled about in every direction, as spilled corn would scatter. He scrambled to his feet and ran—ran, spurred on by terror and fright and fear of death.

An old man near the end of the Gully carrying a horse pistol tucked under his arm peeped about the corner of a deserted building and watched the flying figure coming, watched the flying figure going.

"Cockshot!" he giggled.

Some of the crowd stopped before The Bucket of Blood, others before The Morgue—stopped for a minute, two minutes, then rushed upon and into the two buildings. There came a sound of boards being ripped from their holdings, of breaking glass and bottles; windows and doors disappeared and through the openings where they had been came flying materials of a hundred sorts; a chimney came toppling down; a rope suddenly appeared attached to a corner of one of the buildings with men heaving and tugging at it; sledges and axes and hammers and bars were banging and clattering, and joists and studding and rafters and beams were snapping and

popping and breaking, and a great cloud of dirty dust was rising from the Gully and floating lazily away.

In quicker time than men there had ever seen buildings pulled down, destroyed, razed to the ground. The Bucket of Blood and The Morgue were brought down. A few minutes' work and they were scattered up and down the Gully, with no two boards or timbers left nailed together, with no part of them unbroken that could be broken, trampled upon and kicked about by thousands of feet.

They who had done the work strolled about over the débris, chuckled, cursed, gloated over what they had done, talking in low tones.

"Here's where they got him," said one man to another, whispering. "Got Jack Stickney at the same time, and Jack was one of the first to join 'em. Damn their black souls!"

"Wally Gay belonged to us—he was one of us—just bigger than us, that's all," declared another.

"Wally Gay licked me, licked me in fair fightin'," said Devil Daggy. "He was a bigger man than me!"

"He was a bigger man nor any of us, Devil!"

"Wally told some of us at the gate that night he come back that we was a brainy bunch," said Joe Blakely, a gas-house man. "Wally had us sized up right—we was a brainy bunch!"

"I wish I had my five bucks back!" moaned a voice.

"Me too!" sighed another voice. "I need them five bucks right now!"

They began to drift away, some—the night workers—going on to their homes, others—the day workers—returning to the mills.

When but few remained at the scenes of destruction, old Dicker, carrying his shot-gun, sauntered up. He met Nicker with his horse pistol tucked under his arm.

"Jogs-jolly, Nicker, but they done a smackin' good job of it! Say, boys, say!"

Nicker looked at Dicker and winked—three times.

Dicker looked at Nicker and winked—returning wink for wink.

It might have been a week, two weeks or three weeks after the wrecking of the Leaguers' headquarters—again the chronology of the story is faulty—when Fitzhugh Claiborne, a production clerk at the Bessemer, inexplicably known about the mills as Teapot Claiborne, came into his office back of the mixer building and found a shipping clerk comfortably slouched down in his swivel chair with his feet resting on the top of his desk.

"What d'ye know about it, Teapot?" asked the shipping clerk. "Here I came into your office to have a second's converse with you and you were absent therefrom, so I peeped into your desk, looked for it, found it, and bit off a hunk of your spit-quick special. What d'ye know about that, Teapot?

"Take the soap box, Teapot—I'll keep the chair, for I'm sadly blowed, played out, all in. I'm up to my eyebrows and over in work. I'll have great-grandchildren—if I ever get married—before I get caught up with my work, the way the old dump is turning out steel now.

"Too bad about Wally Gay, isn't it? Old Doc Lampson says he won't be able to get out and do a day's work for a month. But you watch—Wally will fool old Doc Lampson, just as he's already fooled him. Wally's made of iron. If he wasn't he'd be a dead one now, with those two holes the size of damson plums drilled through him. What d'ye know about it?

"But isn't it so, Teapot? While the ruckus was at its worst I said to McNutt that it made me think of an arch with the keystone busted and about to drop out. Then Wally came and dropped in. Goodlow couldn't cut the cheese, Teapot. Not that Wally is a bigger man than Goodlow—I don't say that—but I do say that Wally pulled the trick that did the work and Goodlow didn't pull it. And if they hadn't stemmed the tide when they stemmed it you and I, Teapot, would now be taking our orders from Levi Orlikowskywowsky,

Tony Tontitti, Emanuel Kus and other saviors of humanity. When you're doing persuasive work with the kind of a bunch Wally did his persuasive work with, Teapot, you've got to know them from the ground up and they've got to know you from the ground up, if you're going to garner any fruit from your efforts. They knew Wally and Wally knew them—he was one of them—both from his viewpoint and from theirs.

"But for all that he was one of them, between you and me and the chain pump, Teapot, it took guts to go out to those gates as Wally did and call those fellows fools, idiots, suckers, skunks, yellow scroots, snakes, buzzards, murderers, hellhounds and jackasses, as he did—or so I've heard he did. And it took a surplus of the article, Teapot, to go up into Vinegar Gully as he did that first day, and walk through it as he did, and talk as he did. Without a surplus of the article, Teapot, he would have lasted about as long as a one-cylinder peanut would between an elephant's molars—just about. But dang me, if I wouldn't like to know just what was the convincing argument he used that got 'em going—for he had 'em going days before he was plugged.

"As Professor Tidd at the high school in my old home town—Honeyburg on the White Fork, Teapot—used to say so often: 'Tro-ja flew-it,' or something like that. So I guess we can now say, 'Vinegar Gully flew-it,' for it will soon be not. They're already laying tracks along both sides of it up on the hills and it won't be long before you'll be hearing the merry rattle of cinder, slag, old brick, ashes, dirt, sweepings and scrapings. débris of all kinds, as they dump the hoppers there, filling it up, filling it up. They tell me Cockshot and Conway wept real tears when they woke up to the fact that they'd waited too long before plucking their cantaloupe, and discovered when they did pluck it that it had shriveled. What d'ye know about it, Teapot?

"But doesn't it rouse your risibilities, Teapot, when

you think of old Dicker's pulling the stunt he did? Leaning up against a telephone pole and boo-hooing and bawling out, 'They took him off in the dead wagon!' when he knew all the time they had moved him up to his new house. What d'ye know about that for an old stiff like him?

"Jogs-jolly!" he said when I put it up to him. 'I was sore at The Bucket of Blood because they'd shot Wally out of it and I just kind of s'mised the boys'd do some-thin' like that, everybody likin' Wally, so I deceived 'em. But I didn't expect 'em to gut The Morgue too—jogs-jolly, no! Conway kept a mighty tasty brand of redeye—tastier nor anything else in the burg.' What d'ye know about that?

"It certainly got the Old Man, didn't it? Aged him, grayed him, made him nervous, pulled him down, tired him out, slowed him up. He won't be so keen for so much work as he has been, I'll bet, from now on. You'll see he'll be having Wally help him out with his chores when Wally gets out. Wally will help him a while and then—biff! Bingo! A. G. M.! And when it happens, Teapot, don't forget, don't forget that I discovered Wally Gay and I started him on his meteoric career! If it hadn't been for your Uncle Dudley, Teapot, Wally Gay might be Ackerman's goat yet. I don't say he would be; I say he might be. Isn't it so?

"D'ye mind if I take a smallish nap in your chair, Teapot, while you get out your reports? Honest, I'm all in. Too much of the toil that ennobles. What d'ye know about that, Teapot?"

Wally Gay came out of the room adjoining Goodlow's office.

"Here are fifteen or twenty letters I have written that are ready for you to sign."

"Sign them yourself!" said Goodlow, not looking up from the cost sheet he was studying

"You mean for me to sign your name to them?"

"Sign your own name! Here, let me see one of those letters."

At a buzzer's summons a stenographer came hurrying into the room.

"Take these letters, Tom, and write 'Assistant' before that 'General Manager,'" said Goodlow. "And hereafter when Mr. Gay dictates a letter write 'Assistant General Manager' down there. That's all, Tom. Look here, Wally! Some crazy cost clerk over there in Calla's office has it doped out that it costs seventeen cents to unload ore at Dolly Furnace! It's wrong! Look at it!"

Wally was bending over the general manager's shoulder studying the rows of black figures on the cost sheet.

"It should be sixteen and a half cents," he said.

"I knew it! I knew it was wrong! Why, I could take a scoop shovel and unload it myself for seventeen cents! Fine stuff! Show that sheet to Calla sometime and ask him what he thinks we are over here! Take all these cost sheets with you, Wally, and keep them in there where they'll be handy. And here are the estimates on the two blast furnaces from Barlow and Holliday and from The Fullwood Engineering Company. Look through them, digest them, and let me know about them. Take this bunch of correspondence with you, too, and go over it—it has to do with that rejected export stuff we sent to Canada. And, say, I can't make the Western Mills people understand our methods of steel distribution. Take these schedules and dope out something that will keep them quiet. They'll drive me crazy pretty soon. And suppose you check up Bolling on this sketch of the new tumblers for the ingot mill—looks to me as if he's wrong. Then, here's a howl from Hornsby—something about Castrow's tramping on his toes. Straighten them out."

With his arms full to overflowing Wally went back to the office of the Assistant General Manager. Goodlow glanced over a thoroughly cleared table before him and

smiled. He reached into a drawer, took out a cigar and lighted it. He lifted his feet to the table, leaned back in his chair and locked his hands behind his head.

"Pretty soft!" he chuckled. "Pret-ty soft!"

CHAPTER XX

THE YOUNGEST OLD MAN

GOODLOW'S right hand was very black. It was black with the black grease and oil that gathers on and crusts the hands of the men who work about the engines and roll trains and motors of the steel mills. The hand was white that morning when he went into the mills, but when he returned it was black. He had scrubbed it with soap and water, but it was still black. He went into the mills again in the afternoon and when he came back the hand was blacker still. When he picked up a piece of paper his fingers would leave a smudge on its white surface. Several times he paused in his work at his big mahogany desk to look at the black hand. And each time he looked at it he smiled.

For three days Goodlow had been at work at intervals cleaning out this desk of his, reading old letters, tearing them into bits and throwing them away, or laying them aside if they were of importance to go into his pockets to be carried away. There were hundreds of old and dusty papers to be looked over, papers that had been tucked away in pigeonholes for years, where they had packed themselves in and snuggled up against each other until they occupied astonishingly small spaces. Old photographs of mill men, in little groups and in great crowds, and pictures of new mills under construction and of new furnaces building and of queer wrecks and accidents were hauled out from overflowing drawers into which they had been crammed along with blue prints and magazine clippings and pamphlets and marked copies of newspapers. Stray bits of iron and steel came to light

-pieces of rods, thin slices of bars and rails and billets and channels and girders, sections of wire, all cut and planed and prepared to show up the flaws they contained -pipes or seams or laps or fins or cups—each of them so interesting at the time of its first examination that it had been kept, laid away for another examination, only to be pushed aside and covered up, to work its way down into some dark corner of the desk where it had rusted and rotted. More than one full basket of this heterogeneous material did the janitor carry away before Goodlow had finished his task.

But at last the desk stood clear, as empty as it had been the day it came from the hands of the cabinet-maker. Goodlow looked at the empty pigeonholes, the vacant drawers, and sighed. Then he took a ring of keys from his pocket and removed a key which he laid on a leaf of the desk. He rose and dragged the chair in which he had been sitting to the other side of the long table that stood in front of the desk. It was an old chair, wobbly on its legs and shaky in its arms, and it creaked loudly, as though in protest, when it was being used. The back was leather, as was the seat, and in some places the leather had broken through. It wasn't much of a hair.

Goodlow limped painfully to the door opening out of his office into that of the assistant general manager. He opened the door and looked in.

"You can move in now, Wally," he said. "Bring your hair." He hobbled back to the table and sat down.

Wally Gay came rolling a chair across the floor out of his office into the office of general manager. He pushed it in between the long table and the empty desk.

"I have been thinking I'd take this old chair home with me, Wally. It's the only one I can sit in with any comfort when my sciatica is troubling me, but if you'll give me room for it in that closet yonder I believe I'll leave it here. Then when I come out to have a rag-chewing with you, as I expect to do when my rheumatism will

let me, I'll have something I can sit in without torture."

"Leave it here, leave it here!" returned Wally. "I'll take care of it. And don't forget to come out and use it—often. I'll need you often."

"Oh, no, you won't! No, you won't! But I'll come, I'll come—I want to come. I've no other place to go for a little outing." Goodlow paused and heaved a sigh. "It isn't so easy, Wally, it isn't so easy to—to—oh, I guess I'll start on home now—I'm through." Again he paused and there was silence in the room. Then he went on. "I'm mighty glad you nipped in the bud that move of the men to buy me a present, as I asked you to do in case you heard of any such thing coming up. Here's my present from the men of the mills."

He held up his right hand.

"I'm prouder of that, Wally, than I would be of a diamond the size of a turnip, had they given me one. When I went out through the mills this morning and this afternoon, and those men came crowding about me to shake hands with me, I felt that I had not wholly failed in my work here. My hand is so sore I can hardly use it. Devil Daggy almost crushed it when he gripped it. And I know Tunky Lord smeared his hand thick with fresh grease before he came up. I could tell by the twinkle in the scamp's eye that he wished to recall to me the time I chased him over that twelve-foot fence back of the Billet Mill with a billet hook. Why, I wouldn't care if I never got that hand clean again!"

"Well, I must go. Good-by, Wally."

"I'll go out to your car with you."

When he came back into the office Wally pushed the old chair across the room to a closet in which he stowed it away. Then he went to his own chair standing between the table and the empty desk. For a long while he sat musing, with his mind rapidly reviewing the years that had passed, letting it dwell for several moments on the event of his first coming into that office, a dirty-faced youth in greasy overalls, twisting his little cloth cap about

in his grimy hands, nervous, scared, embarrassed. Back through the years of hard work and cruel grilling, when men had laughed at him, when foreman and superintendent had imposed on him, doubled and trebled his working shifts, called him "everybody's goat," to a day when a shipping clerk had said to him, "How would you like to come in here and push a pencil and help rustle the manila paper?" Then he smiled, he chuckled, the chuckle broke into a laugh.

"Take a letter, Tom," he said to the stenographer who had answered the buzzer's summons.

"Shall I write 'General Manager' beneath the blank space I leave for your signature?" asked the stenographer when the dictation had ended.

"Yes, I suppose that will be necessary from now on."

"I'd like to congratulate you, Mr. Gay, I'm mighty glad."

"Thank you, Tom."

At his typewriter the stenographer read over his notes and grinned.

"Say, Wallman, what do you suppose, now, is his first official act?" he asked another stenographer whose desk stood near his.

"What?"

"I'll let you read the letter when I've written it. It's rich."

A messenger boy on his next trip into the mills carried the letter to the shipping department. A shipping clerk sat at his desk industriously shuffling a stack of blue, pink, yellow and white shipping bills. A half dozen young men sat at desks near by and they, too, worked busily.

"What d'ye know about it, boys?" asked the shipping clerk, without pausing in his work or without looking up. "I don't believe we'll ever get caught up with our work—never! I'm thinking very seriously of leaving this old dump. I think I'll go West—out to Arizona and take up some free land there and start raising Angora

goats. They tell me that if you know anything at all about goats you can get independently rich at goat ranching. And I certainly know something about goats—I'm one myself or I wouldn't have stayed on this dinky job like I have and let them stick all this work off on me year after year. I sometimes think I'm getting a little bit old. What d'ye know about it?"

The door of the office opened and a messenger boy came in.

"Anything for me, Snigglefritzy?" called the shipping clerk.

"One letter. The rest goes to Cavendish," replied the messenger. He threw down his bundle and went out.

"More work, I suppose," grumbled the shipping clerk as he tore open the letter one of the young men tossed to him.

He read the enclosure. He read it a second time.

"Well, I'll be dogged, danged if I won't!" he muttered, and he rose, took his hat from a nail above his desk and set it upon his head. Then he sat down and reread the letter.

"Well, I'll be danged, dogged if I won't! What d'ye know about that?" he chuckled.

He rose from his chair and hung his hat back on the nail. Then he read the letter once more.

"What d'ye know about that, boys?" he demanded, moving toward the desks where the young men worked. "Attention! Cease firing! Kindly gather about me and allow me to divulge the contents of the communication I have just received from our new general manager, Mr. Wellington Gay."

"We're waiting, all keyed up, Bob," said a pink-cheeked youth.

"Ahem! But before I begin let us all take a nibble from my own plug of spit-quick. Double your quids, boys, double your quids! On festive occasions let us be festive!"

"Ahem! 'Mr. Robert Windish, Shipping Department.'

What d'ye know about that, boys. 'My dear Mr. Windish'—Sounds sociable-like, eh? 'I am creating a new position which I wish to offer to you and which I trust you will see your way clear to accept.' Any exceptions to that?"

"Shove over into high gear, Bob!" called a hollow-eyed young man in a far corner of the room.

"Ahem! Well, boys, the remainder of the letter is of such a personal nature that I will just give you a sort of digest of it.

"The new job is this: I'm to be chief steerer of the rubbernecks who come to Steelburg Mills to acquire a few of the essentials of the art of steel making. At present this work is very inefficiently done by several and divers—gate watchmen, clerks, foremen, superintendents—anybody that can be picked up.

"I am to have a desk, a chair and a cuspidor in the big hall just outside Mr. Gay's office. As our visitors enter the building I will meet them, ask them what it is they desire, and politely—if they look classy—conduct them to the office of Mr. Gay's secretary, who will either write permits for them to enter the plant or tell them there is nothing doing.

"With the passes procured, I shall lead our callers toward the mills, entertaining them as I lead with light conversation on such subjects as rain, snow, mud, sunshine, cold waves, winds, bad colds. If a Midline freight should be blocking our immediate entrance to the plant I shall turn the conversation to weightier themes, asking them—if they appear to be politicians—what they think of the coming election; if they look to be school-teachers I will inquire if they do not think Whittier's Snow Bound a charming poem. What d'ye know about that, boys?

"Once inside the plant, I shall proceed to point out to them all the interesting details of steel making and to answer their various interesting questions, telling them how much the men make a day and how many hours they

work, explaining what pulls the bars through the rolls, why they use fluorspar in the Open Hearth, why the smoke from the Bessemers is yellow and not black and so forth. And I will tell them the horse power of the different engines we have, give them the temperatures of all the furnaces they peep into and estimate for them the weights of the various blooms, billets, bars and chunks of steel we see lying about the mills and yard.

"Isn't it so, boys? It's a job that's going to require a raft of talk, but I feel that I can fill it.

"I shall also from my station in the big hall just outside Mr. Gay's office receive the raging Russian, the beery Bulgarian, the dashing Dalmatian and the savage Serb, who come to the main office to find out why they were fired for being drunk, cussing out the foreman and sleeping on duty, and wanting to kill somebody and get their pay. While Mr. Gay doesn't speak of its character in his letter, I trust my new cuspidor will be of iron and that there will be a handle to it.

"And there will be the insurance solicitor, the book agent, the blue-sky salesman, the collector of funds for our little brown brethren in the Philippines, the inventor of the perpetual-motion machine that will run these mills without the need of steam, gas, electricity, wind or water, and divers other nuts whom I shall have to shoo away from our busy midst.

"Well, boys, as Julius Cæsar tellingly said, 'Labor vexit mensa,' which means—virtue gets its reward. You know I discovered Mr. Gay, boys. Years ago when Mr. Gay, then a young man just a year or two younger than myself, came into the office where I happened to be at work and set me right on a difficult problem in mathematics with which I was at the moment wrestling, I said then and there, 'Some day this young gentleman will be head of Steelburg Mills.' What d'ye know about that? Was my prophecy correct? Look at the signature at the bottom of this letter—'Wellington Gay, General Manager.' Wellington Gay, boys, the youngest Old Man

that ever sat in the general manager's office, the boss of ten thousand men.

"And say, boys, aren't the mills tickled? A man at the head of them who worked his way up from their own ranks—that's what they like! Actually I feel sorry for you stiffs when I think what is ahead of you in the way of work. You'll never be able to keep caught up—never! This old dump is going to hum henceforward as it never hummed hencebackward. Mr. Gay will send word to the mills, 'A little more zip, please,' and you chaps will have an extra thousand tons or two of steel products to take care of. Cogitate on it.

"Oh, the mills are for him! Look how they elected him councilman from this ward, with the whole rotten city-hall bunch fighting him simply because he was decent and stood for law enforcement. Pretty small spuds of the city-hall gang, wasn't it?—trying to discredit him by bringing up the question of his birth, telling it about that he was the son of some old drunken hag that used to be in the bughouse here. But he denied nothing, affirmed nothing—paid no attention to their mud slinging, and beat them all hollow. Though a good per cent of the mill men admired the morals of the city-hall gang, they stuck by Wally. And he's getting things done for old Steelburg too. I noticed a street gang filling in that hog wallow up in front of the Grand House yesterday. What d'ye know about that?

"Well, boys, I must hasten to write a letter to Mr. Gay accepting his kind offer. I know he's in a hurry for me to enter upon my new duties and I know I'm in a hurry. Isn't it so, boys? Labor vexit mensa."

The growth of Steelburg Mills continued, a steady growth and a very rapid one. Another blast furnace had been erected on the former site of Vinegar Gully; a new steel foundry had gone up and was turning out steel castings; another bar mill had been built; another two-vessel Bessemer was blowing steel and a new Open Hearth was under construction. Stanley Kirk's furnace

plant at Ferro Junction was now in reality an adjunct of Steelburg Mills—the entire output of the furnaces was being purchased by the mills and going there in hot-metal form.

Then Stanley Kirk proposed selling his plant to the Mills. He went first to Wally Gay to ascertain his views on the subject.

"If we can procure control of the railway between here and the Junction I will recommend the purchase of the furnaces," said Wally. "If we cannot buy the railroad we don't want the furnaces. With the railroad in our possession we can arrange our shipments, both incoming and outgoing, in such a manner that we can participate in the freight charges on every car of material we handle. Look here."

He took paper and pencil and began an arithmetical demonstration that caused his caller, watching the moving pencil, to exclaim again and again. When the figures were all assembled Kirk took the sheet and studied it for several moments.

"Well, I can see that the sale of my furnaces to Steelburg Mills is assured," he laughed as he laid the paper down. "For I know the old stub line can be bought—it can be bought at a low figure. And if you present your plan for going into the railroad business to your board of directors as you have here presented it to me there will be a transfer of property in short order."

Steelburg Mills bought the stub line connecting Steelburg and Ferro Junction and at the same time took over the Kirk furnaces. And Wally Gay became manager of the important iron plant that had been established in early days by old Kent Masterson, that had been enlarged and operated through a long period by Kent Masterson, Jr., that had become the property of Dunwood Masterson, to be sold by him to Stanley Kirk.

A few days after the transfer of the properties had been made Wally traveled to Ferro Junction on the hot-metal train. The road had been repaired, in places

entirely rebuilt, since that night years before when he had watched the four huge ladles of hot metal ripping and pouring down the hillside following the collapse of a bridge. He shuddered as the train passed the spot where the wreck had occurred, where he had found the woman, Nan Sorrel, lying in the road with the red metal washing about her, her face in the yellow clay, her clothing aflame—where he had watched her die.

Was Nan Sorrel his mother? He had no doubt of it. The man Damrosch had never come back bringing the proofs that she was, as he had said he would do, but the few words the woman had spoken just before she died had convinced him. It would take much to shake this conviction.

When the train reached the Junction he did not at once go to Kirk's office, but walked off toward the furnaces. The furnace superintendent had been to Steelburg that morning to see him and he had told the man he would come to the Junction that afternoon to go over the plant with him and to get acquainted with a number of the men.

United States Senator Dunwood Masterson was with Stanley Kirk in his office that afternoon and from where he sat he saw Wally passing through the yard. He rose and went to a window.

"Come here, Stan," he said sharply.

Kirk joined the Senator at the window.

"Look at him! Do you see it?"

"Oh, yes, I have seen it ever since you spoke of it to me."

"Explain it."

"I can't."

"Suggest something."

"Nothing."

The two stood watching the new manager of the old Masterson iron plant. He was not a great distance from them. They saw him stop and begin examining a locomotive crane that had been wrecked and cast to

one side of the railway tracks. The figure of the man they watched was a striking one—strongly built and powerful, straight and symmetrical; and the face told of unusual strength of character, and seen in profile it was singularly attractive.

The furnace superintendent came up and joined Wally. After a few minutes at the derailed crane they walked away together toward the furnaces.

Masterson left the window muttering, "I can't understand it! I can't understand it!"

Kirk returned to his desk and resumed his work there. For a long while there was silence in the room. Then Masterson spoke.

"Stan, there was a man came to me three or four years ago and asked me if I was interested in Wally Gay. A queer-looking fellow he was, too, with his tiny eyes, his enormous nose and an almost complete absence of chin. I told him I was interested in Wally Gay in a way. He then asked me if I would like to know where he came from. I answered him that I would. Then, would I pay for such information? I replied that I would if his demand were reasonable. He said he would furnish me with the number and initials of the car in which Wally Gay came to Steelburg Mills, with the date of the car's arrival there and also the point of shipment of the car, for two hundred dollars."

Stanley Kirk dropped his work and was listening intently.

"Well?" he said questioningly as Masterson paused.

"I was of course interested, greatly interested. I asked the fellow what were his proofs. He said he had original papers—so he spoke of them—carrying the information he wished to sell me. So I agreed to his proposal.

"He then showed me what was, he said—and I fully accepted his statement—a page from a car-record book listing loaded cars received at Steelburg Mills. Before one of the numbers was a faded blue-pencil cross mark

which had been put there by the yardmaster at Steelburg Mills, he claimed, to mark that car as the one in which Wally Gay, the infant, had been found by Joe Gay. The date of the car's arrival was at the top of the page.

"I asked him how he knew the cross mark had been put there for that purpose.

"He said the man who had put it there—McKnight, McNutt—I forget which—had told him he put it there. He stated he had once worked for this McKnight or McNutt. This man is now dead, I have learned.

"Then he showed me a page cut from a receiving clerk's book whereon was set down the point of shipment of the car—it was a car of pig iron."

"Where was it shipped from?" asked Kirk.

"From here—from these furnaces. It was while you and I were in partnership—a few years before I turned over everything to you."

"Well?"

"Nothing—that's all. I paid the fellow and made a memorandum of the data. I have it yet. I tried to procure the papers he held, but he would not surrender them. Once afterward when Wally was visiting me I tried to bring up the subject of his origin, but I failed—something I saw leap into his eyes as I broached the question warned me to drop it."

"The child could have been placed in the car between here and Steelburg, or even in Steelburg, before the car was shoved into the steel mills' yards," said Kirk, turning back to his work.

"True—I thought of that. The information the fellow sold me was worthless. But there was a strange coincidence, Stan, that I noticed at the time I was looking at his papers. The date of the car's arrival at Steelburg was the day following my wife's coming here to my house."

Kirk wheeled about suddenly.

"Is that so? And she came at night, didn't she?"

"Yes."

Kirk sat tapping his hand with his pencil.

"Are you sure—" he began, but he did not finish his question. And again after a moment's silence he turned back to his work.

Masterson rose and went to a window. From where he stood the ruins of the old Masterson mansion could be seen, and Kirk stealing a glance at him saw that his eyes were turned in that direction.

"Stan," said the Senator, coming back to his chair, "I shudder yet, I grow sick at heart whenever I think of the awful experience of that poor girl that night. Coming here alone, arriving at that great gloomy old house up there on the hill in the middle of the night—sick, frightened, half drowned from her experience with the drunken cabman who drove her out from the city, and then not finding me there—finding no one but crazy Nan Sorrel, crazier then than she had ever been before. God, what she must have suffered! Oh, if I had only been at home that night! But I had no thought of her coming—she had not notified me—I had no idea of her whereabouts. Before that time I had arrived at the conclusion that she meant to keep her parting word with me—that she would never see me again.

"I have told you, Stan, what a delicate creature she was and how little she knew of the hard and ugly side of the world and of life. She was the daughter of my teacher in mathematics at college, who died soon after I had finished school. He left her with abundant means, but quite alone in the world—she had not, to her knowledge, a single relative. I went back there to the old college town and we were married and at once started for Europe on an extended tour.

"I doubt if there was ever a happier pair than we two on that long honeymoon of ours as we wandered slowly through Europe. Then the sudden ending of that happy life—~~the~~ painful ending of it—that black day in my

New York soon after our return to America, in a moment of unreasonable, ungovernable anger, so violent it was all but insanity, she left me, desiring she would never see me again. I did not bear, for I knew she loved me as dearly as I loved her. I sat down and waited and waited for her back to me, confident that she would. But I n vain—she did not come back, and all my searched to discover her, failed to uncover the least her whereabouts. Then, months afterward, I dead—dead in my own house here—with crazy rrel sitting at the foot of the bed on which she lay at her and muttering and jabbering idiotically. "Yes me, Stan, to recall it all."

had abandoned his work and sat with his hands deep into his pockets. And again there was a period of silence in the room.

"Do you suppose he had Nan Sorrel buried in the cemetery, Stan?"

lieve he did it because he had seen her die a death in the hot-metal spill—his pity was stirred, pathy for the unfortunate creature roused. That it to me. I can offer no other explanation, I gine no other. You know, the city-hall gang in to defeat him in his campaign for councilman the report that Nan Sorrel was his mother, but

it?" Masterson's voice was raised to a shout. "Ridiculous! Idiotic! Why, Stan, I never f that—I was in Washington at the time! Tell ut it!"

they did it! It was a monstrous thing to do, I know that gang. He never made any refer- the charge, spoke about it to no one, ignored lately, but I think——"

door behind the two men opened and the sub- their conversation stepped into the room. They

both started and for an instant surprise and consternation showed on their faces. Kirk first recovered his composure and spoke.

"Hello, there! Come in and take possession! But, no, I can't let you do that either—not for a week yet. I verily believe it will take me that long to get all my personal junk collected and sorted out."

"Take your time," laughed Wally. "Tompkins will keep the furnaces turning out iron. That's what we're in need of—not office room."

Masterson rose and shook hands.

"I'm down here bidding Kirk and the old place a final good-by," he said, smiling.

"Oh, continue to consider it the old place and come down whenever you feel homesick for the furnaces. Sometimes you'll find me loafing about here—Tompkins will always be here. You know Tompkins, don't you?"

"Oh, dear, yes! I gave Tompkins his first job. I'm glad he has gone ahead as he has. He was a good boy."

Conversation passed between the three for a few minutes. Then Kirk asked, "You gentlemen will excuse me for a little while, will you not, if I continue with my work? I'll be through shortly."

Masterson and Wally turned to each other and the subject of the old Masterson furnaces was introduced. A question rose as to the exact location of the first charcoal furnace old Kent Masterson had built.

"Tompkins has told you wrong," said Masterson. "Come with me and I'll point out the exact site." And they left the office.

"Things have greatly changed about here since I managed the plant—and for the better, too," remarked the former owner of the place as they passed by the towering stacks, with the shrieking and whining of the air that was being forced through the mains and tuyères, in their ears, and with the earth beneath their feet pulsating to the rhythmic beat and pound of the blowing engines.

"Steelburg Mills makes a great acquisition by taking over this group of furnaces. Your management will extend over this plant too?"

"Yes, it has been so decided. Ferro Junction will from now on be our shipping inlet and outlet. Ore, limestone, coal—all our raw materials will come this way, and all or very nearly all our outgoing shipments will pass through the Junction. The Midline is in for a jolt, a hard jolt. They have been gouging us in more ways than one. Now we shall be independent of them."

"Your idea?"

"Largely, I suppose."

"A good one—a big one."

Their way to the site of the old charcoal furnace led them past the ruins of the old stone house on the hill above the roadway. As they returned Masterson paused in front of the place of desolation.

"My grandfather built that house, my father remodeled and enlarged it, and I—I abandoned it to ruin. I must have it pulled down—I really must. I have been intending to do that for a long while."

"I clubbed chestnuts from a tree up in that yard once," laughed Wally.

"You did? From the big tree near the house?"

"Yes."

"My grandfather planted that tree there. Let us go up and see if it is yet living."

They climbed the weedy terraces and entered the brush-grown yard.

"There it is!" cried Masterson. "And it's alive yet! Well, well! Many a time did I gather its chestnuts when I was a boy—and when I was a man too. I was born in that room up there—that one to the left with the small windows."

"I've been in it," said Wally, smiling. "I've been all through the house. I broke in there once."

"What? You were a housebreaker as well as a chestnut stealer?"

"I was everything a young Vinegar Gully hoodlum was—worse than most of them, I'm afraid."

"Did you—did you ever find out anything about your—your parentage, Wally?"

Masterson asked the question hesitatingly, doubtfully.

"I learned who my mother was," replied Wally. Then he added quickly, "But I talk about that to no one."

Masterson looked away.

"I suppose we may as well move on," he said after moment's silence. He was turning away when he stopped. "There's some one coming out of the house yonder, isn't there?" he asked.

A man issued from a doorway in the back portion of the building and walked rapidly across the yard, climbed a fence and disappeared in a thicket of low trees.

"I think I've seen that man before," said Masterson. "Oh, now I recall him—I had some dealings with him once."

"And I too—unpleasant dealings," muttered Wall. "I wonder what he is doing here."

"I'm going to have the old building pulled down at once," declared Masterson as they left the yard.

But he didn't. And the man who had disappeared in the thicket returned to the old house, not only that day but at intervals through many months thereafter.

CHAPTER XXI

WELLINGTON GAY

STEELBURG MILLS prospered, paid huge dividends to the company owning and operating the plant, and continued to grow. The new Open Hearth was completed; additional acreage had been purchased, adjoining the plant, and engineers were busy there with rod and transit; the stub line running to Ferro Junction had been double-tracked and trains of ore and limestone and all, of billets and bars and rails—all the raw materials made at Steelburg Mills and all the products of steel made there—together with the long drags of huge ladles of hot metal, were night and day rolling up and down the line. And the pillar of fire that marked the location of Steelburg Mills by night was bigger and brighter than it had ever been before, the cloud of smoke that hung over them by day bigger and blacker.

And the big city of which Steelburg was a corporate part prospered and continued to grow, climbing toward and past the million mark. And travelers came to the big city in ever-increasing numbers, men running up and down the world on the world's business, and seeing over in the heavens to the west of the city the red fire at night, the black pall of smoke by day, inquired and learned they were near to Steelburg Mills, the fame which had already reached their ears, and they came to Steelburg to beg permission to go through the huge plant and look upon its thousand wonders.

Came to Steelburg in such numbers that Robert Winslow, chief guide, who had a desk, a chair and a cuspidor in the big hall just outside the office of the general

manager of Steelburg Mills, found little opportunity to use the desk, the chair or the cuspidor, so busy was he with his duties as chief guide.

"What d'ye know about it, Mr. Crittenden?" he inquired of the general manager's secretary as he stood before that gentleman's desk one afternoon fanning his face with his cap. "This job of mine isn't any pudding with seeded raisins and cinnamon drops in it. I want to inform you! I don't believe I ever will get caught up with my work—never! Why I'm on the trot, come and go, all the time. Actually, I don't get a chance to reminate, meditate or cogitate a minute—all I do is to ambulate and articulate. What d'ye know about it?

"Honest, Mr. Crittenden, there are hours and hours when I have no opportunity whatever to nibble my plum. For you can't be shooting the weed, Mr. Crittenden, with a bunch of Yale professors or a flock of suffragettes or a covey of high-school flappers gathered about you listening with delighted ears to your elucidations of the mysteries of steel making. It can't be genteelly done.

"What d'ye know about it, Mr. Crittenden? Give it a thought. Yesterday morning I entertained the members of the Soap Boilers' Convention, which is meeting in the big city this week. In the afternoon I had six doctors, four priests and two old-maid fluffs. This morning came those four Japanese students from Tokio Tech, the nine male school-teachers and the old G. A. R. boys. This afternoon I rushed through a herd of scrubs, an Austrian duke and his staff and that bunch of drunken lake captains. You remember them all—you wrote passes for them. What d'ye know about it?

"And that's the way it goes all the time, all the time. Right now, Mr. Crittenden—and it's only four o'clock—I feel like I'd been cradling wheat since sunup on a hillside, as they used to do before they got binders down round my old home town—Honeyburg on the White Fork, Mr. Crittenden. Isn't it so?

"And not only is there my leg work and my larynx

work, but my strong-arm work too. You should have climped me playing ping-pong with the two Greiners yesterday, who came to get some back pay they had already drawn once and to start a rough-house. Every day I have to bounce something out the front door. I'm busy man. And I simply have to take dumb-bell exercises every night before going to bed to keep my biceps trim. What d'ye know about that, Mr. Crittenden? I tell you I've got a job that's a job!

"Listen! There's somebody out in the hall now! I'll bet it's a bunch of gawkers wanting to wander through the old dump. Tell 'em the guide's gone home sick, Mr. Crittenden. Tell 'em four visitors were burned to death in the plant this morning when a ladle of hot stuff tipped over. Tell 'em anything, Mr. Crittenden, only don't tell 'em the truth. I'll shuffle out and shoo 'em in to you. What d'ye know about it?"

The big city of which Steelburg was a corporate part continued to grow. And it continued to prosper in a way in spite of the debaucheries of the gang that held the city hall and controlled the affairs of the great municipality. Every year saw an increase in the population, an increase in the number of new buildings erected, an increase in the tax rate, an increase in the number of murders, holdups and robberies—an increase in crime of every sort.

Crime—crime flaunted itself openly in the streets of the big city and went unpunished. Crime in all its thousand hideous shapes and forms found in the big city a place of refuge, took its cue from the gang in the city hall and waxed fat. The underworlds of other big cities heard of its rich pickings, turned to it and there established themselves to ply their trades in safety and security.

And the city-hall gang became bolder, grew stronger, more powerful, and stole and grafted and squandered the public moneys until the name of the big city far and wide was a byword and a hissing. And a facetious

councilman introduced a resolution in council that would change the city's name to that of Crookshaven.

But there came a day at last when the decent, law-abiding, law-loving and respectable citizens of the big city met together in great numbers, forgot politics and political affiliations and began planning a campaign that would reestablish law and order.

"A big man with a big job, with a bigger job than is the one we will ask him to take in the office of mayor of this city—that is the kind of man we must look for and find," said the chairman of the first meeting of the Civic League. "A man who has handled big business projects, who has shown himself possessed of executive ability, whose record as a business man and as a private individual is absolutely clean and unsmirched. And let him be not an aristocrat, not a plutocrat, but a man close to the common people."

"Name him!" some one shouted.

"I can't," replied the chairman. "Somebody else name him."

"Wally Gay!" called a voice. There was a moment's silence. Then somebody in the back part of the hall laughed.

"And who is Wally Gay?" demanded a college professor who sat on the stage behind the chairman.

A dozen men in different parts of the house rose to answer the question. And as a result of that and other meetings of the Civic League a committee traveled to Steelburg one day, to the office of the general manager of Steelburg Mills, to ask Wally Gay to become the league's candidate for mayor of the big city.

"I will give you my answer in three days," he told the committee.

It was the morning of the third day and he was in his office alone. A coal fire snapped and crackled in a big brick fireplace in one corner of the room, for it was a chill day in early fall. He stood before the fire gazing at the yellow flames.

"I don't like it," he muttered. "But it must be done—some one must do it! Two years—four years away from here! I don't like it—this is my work! I can't do it!"

He went to his desk, sat down and picked up a pen, but he did not begin to write.

The door leading from his into his secretary's office was open. He heard some one enter the adjoining room and he heard his secretary say, "In yonder."

A man entered his office, his hat in his hand, a large yellow-paper envelope under his arm. His hair was remarkably curly, his nose was abnormally large and a scraggly black beard hid the chin that wasn't there.

Wally Gay raised his eyes from the sheet of paper which he had placed before him. Then he laid down the pen he had picked up and rose from his chair.

"So you've come back?"

The man had not advanced far into the room. He stopped now, gave a quick glance at the open door and shifted the yellow envelope under his arm.

"I—I—" he stammered.

"What do you want?"

"I'm not here for what you think I am, Mr. Gay," he said. "I—I was lying to you that other time. The old woman was not your mother, but I can now tell you who was—and your father too. And I have the proofs here."

Wally strode across the room, kicked the wooden wedge from beneath the door holding it open, shut it and locked it and drew out the key.

The man watched him with scared eyes.

"I tell you, Mr. Gay, everything's all right. You'll be glad to learn what I've come here to tell you!"

"Twice before you have approached me on the subject of my birth, a subject I forbid any one to discuss to me or before me!"

"Yes, but this—"

"When I finish with you this time you will never come to me again! I told you that last time if you ever, before

you had brought me the proof, breathed a word of what you told me——”

“But I never did, Mr. Gay, I never did!” broke in the man. He was now thoroughly frightened and he backed away toward the locked door.

“Who told the city-hall gang that the woman, Nan Sorrel, was my mother? You did!”

“I did not! I swear I did not! I swear by all that's holy I did not!”

Some note of sincerity in the voice arrested the torrent of anger that started to burst from Wally's lips and he was silent.

“I tell you I didn't!” repeated the man. “I admit that I was lying to you, that I was trying to get money from you that other time, but I never repeated what I said to you then! I was afraid to—I was afraid of you—even if I had wanted to, and I didn't, because there would have been nothing for me to gain. But what I've got here is all right and when you find out that Masterson is——”

“Masterson is what?”

“Your father!”

Amazement, bewilderment, incredulity showed in Wally's eyes as he stared at the face before him. He turned and walked to his chair between the desk and the table and sat down. The man slowly approached the table.

“Oh, I can prove it—I have all the proofs right here,” he said, tapping the yellow envelope. “Incontestable proofs.”

“And my mother—who was she?”

“Your father's wife! And I have the proof for that here too!”

Wally had picked up a steel paper knife and was springing the blade back and forth, bending it almost to the breaking point.

“I say everything is all right, Mr. Gay—nothing you will be ashamed of. I should say not! I've spent a

lot of time and money in running down and getting these proofs all together, but I've got everything and they're yours—for a consideration."

The speaker waited a moment, then went on.

"You'll want these papers—you've got to have them. You're a big man and you've got to have them. These papers are going to elect you mayor of the big city. Without them and with the city-hall gang spreading a lot of rotten lies about you—and they're going to do that—you'll be defeated. Why, if the word gets out now that you are the son, the legitimate son, of United States Senator Masterson you'll have a walkaway. Masterson is popular—why, the name Masterson will elect you!"

The springing and bending of the steel blade of the paper knife continued.

"Now, I'm going to be reasonable, Mr. Gay. I've spent a lot of time and money on this case and I don't think ten thousand is too much to ask of you. You're a big man, you want to be bigger and you've got to clear up your——"

"I am Wellington Gay!"

The words were spoken in a low tone of voice. Wally had not taken his eyes from the knife blade and he was speaking more to himself than to the man near him.

"All that I have I got as Wellington Gay. If I have been successful I attained to that success as Wellington Gay. I have lived my life as Wellington Gay—I shall continue to live it Wellington Gay."

"I think I'm very reasonable, considering the——"

"Get out of here with your damned proofs! I don't want them!"

The man started back for Wally had raised his eyes and there was danger in them and danger in his voice.

"Well, if you don't want them I might as well throw them into the fire!"

"Yonder's a fire—throw them in!"

"Now, look here, Mr. Gay—I've spent a lot of time

and money running this thing down. You've got to have—I know that this information, with all the proofs, is worth what I've asked you, but I'll——”

“Throw them into the fire!”

“By heaven, I will! I'll destroy them! And I'll——”

“Do it! There's the fire!”

The man turned and looked at the blazing coal in the big fireplace.

“Would—would you pay half of it?” His voice was wheedling now. “Wouldn't you pay a quarter of it?”

“Again I tell you I don't want them!”

“Now look here, Mr. Gay—I'm going to trust to your generosity and your squareness. I know you're a square man. I'm going to show you these proofs and when you see how absolutely complete they are you'll—look here!”

With a quick movement he had jerked the yellow envelope open and drawn out a number of papers, most of them yellow and stained and rumpled with many foldings. He had them evidently arranged in the order in which he intended to present them, for he took the top paper of the pile and without glancing at it tossed it across the table. It fell very close to the hands that were springing and bending the steel blade of the paper knife.

“There's the car number and initial of the car—P.G.M. 67677. Harvey McNutt put that blue pencil cross mark there. And there's the point of shipment of the car—Ferro Junction, Masterson and Kirk.”

“Where did you get these sheets?” demanded Wally.

His eyes had gone no farther than to the printed captions at the tops of the papers.

“I won't answer your question. I got them—there they are. I once read an article by a famous detective. He said always to get the originals. I got them.

“Now here is something that verifies that first——”

The steel blade of the paper knife snapped and the two pieces tinkled and rattled as they fell from Wally's hands.

“That? That?” he shouted. “You've got that?

Where—oh, now I remember! So you mutilated my Bible, did you, that day you entered my room at the Falls House? Why, you cur, I'll send you to state's prison for this! I'll——"

The man fell to trembling, but he broke in on Wally's speech.

"Oh, that doesn't amount to much," he said, and he hurriedly picked up the next paper.

"Here's the big find," he went on rapidly, "the biggest find of all by far. I hunted for it off and on for years in the old house before I discovered it—it was stuck away in a hole in a chimney behind a loose brick."

Wally was not listening to him—the spoken words were but a mumble of sound in his ears. He was staring at the faded lines old Joe Gay had written in his sprawling, crooked characters years before—"Wellington Gay, P.G.M. 67677"—and the day and the month and the year of Wellington Gay's coming to Steelburg—to Vinegar Gully. Before his eyes there floated a picture of old Joe Gay, his foster father, drooping from age and long years of toil, with his kindly, weather-beaten face wrinkled and seamed, bending over this sheet of paper, his big, blunt, calloused fingers gripping the pen, painfully tracing out the letters of that name—Wellington Gay. A sob came up into his throat and choked him and he turned away and looked out of the window near his desk.

"It's a letter your mother wrote for your father," the man rattled on. "It tells nearly everything, but I've got other papers too—a copy of a doctor's certificate of birth and so forth. I had quite a time locating them. On the back of the letter is something old Nan Sorrell set down—something about putting you in the car, with the car number and initial. It's pretty hard to read. I knew the old woman had hidden something in the house pertaining to this case, for I talked with her a couple of times, and I kept on searching until I found it. Now here are some copies of records that complete——"

With the meaningless mumble of the words in his ears

"... papers with you!"

"To hell with them! And with man, and he opened the door and

In the big hall just outside the office Robert Windish, chief guide, his face with his hat. He had justing a party of sightseers through ear had caught the sound of raised manager's office and that command,

"What d'ye know about that?" i work for me, I suppose."

He rose and took station near the entrance into the secretary's room. The do man rushed out, muttering and cursing,

"What d'ye know about that? It nose!" exclaimed Mr. Windish. "V danged if I won't! What's all the b side, Nosey-nose?"

"Get out of my way, you rattle & was still in the man's voice.

"Rattle gabber!" cried Mr. Windish. "What do you know about that? Rattle gabber! question, what the rumpus was a know what Nosey-nose knows...."

"Eyes front, Jannie! Straight ahead!" snapped Mr. Windish. And then he added—"Dumb-bells certainly keep a fellow in bouncing condition. Some prefer Indian clubs, but bells for me, bells for me! Biff! Bingo! And also—zip! That's the caper, Jannie! There's the door, Mr. Damrosch!"

The swinging doors flew open as the body of Janus Damrosch crashed against them and shot through the opening. A stout lady in black with a Turkish towel draped over her head was thrust backward by the sudden rush.

"Ach!" she cried.

"What d'ye know about that, madam? Classy work, eh?" suggested Mr. Windish.

"Mine hoosband—his foot is seeck!" wailed the stout woman. "He can no come for pay. I come for pay."

"Yes, ma'am. Just step this way, please, ma'am, and I'll introduce you to our young cashier, Mr. Sourwine. What d'ye know about it? You don't use—I mean cogitate on it, madam, cogitate. Isn't it so? Mr. Sourwine! Oh, Mr. Sourwine! A lady to see you! What d'ye know about that, Mr. Sourwine? Pour your troubles in at the window, madam."

Mr. Windish walked across the hall to his chair, pulled a leaf from the desk, elevated his feet to it and breathed heavily.

"It's a position, not a job!" he declared emphatically.

When the closing door shut the man Damrosch from his office, Wally returned to his desk. He pulled out a drawer, took therefrom a small iron box and opened it with a key which he selected from among a number on a ring he carried in his pocket. He folded the leaf that had been cut out of old Joe Gay's Bible, put it carefully into the box and locked and returned the box to the drawer.

He picked up his pen, drew a sheet of paper before him and started to write. But his hand trembled so vio-

lently that the writing was almost illegible. He laid the pen down and tore up the sheet of paper and threw the pieces into a wastebasket.

His eyes wandered to the papers that had been left lying on his table. He pushed them together without looking at the writing they carried, gathered them up and went toward the fireplace. As he was bending to pitch them upon the blazing coals the door opened and Crittenden, his secretary, looked in.

"Mr. Masterson wishes to see you," he said.

"Tell him to come in."

And Wally returned to the table and dropped the papers upon it.

Senator Masterson came into the room.

"Ah, Wally, I've just heard the wonderful news!" he cried, advancing with outstretched hand, a smile lighting up his fine face. "I've been out of town for two weeks, returning just last night. As soon as I heard what had taken place in my absence I came at once to see you. I congratulate you, I certainly congratulate you."

"You mean——"

"The action of the Civic League in asking you to be its candidate for mayor of the big city. Have you accepted?"

"No."

"But you are going to accept?"

"I am considering the question."

"When are you to give your answer?"

"To-day."

"Wally, you must—you must accept! You are exactly the man we need for the gigantic task of cleaning up this city. My disappointment will be nothing less than despair if you do not consent to make the race. We'll elect you, we'll elect you, never fear. Don't let the thought of possible defeat enter your mind."

"It hasn't."

Masterson drew his chair closer to the table near which he had sat down and leaned forward, and with all his

eloquence and power of persuasion began arguing and pleading with the man before him, urging him to heed the call to civic duty.

"I have no doubt you are naturally reluctant to go into this, for your interests are in things of steel, your heart is in your work here—your preference is for steel just as mine was for politics. I know you will have to make sacrifices if you accept and are elected.

"I know you will find the work distasteful and I know in your campaign you will be attacked by the city-hall gang in the same disgusting manner, along the same lines they attacked you in your campaign for councilman. Only this time they will go to greater lengths of infamy. The question of your early life, of your birth, will be brought up and used——"

"If I should run for mayor I would run as Wellington Gay—Wellington Gay of Steelburg, of Vinegar Gully!"

"Yes, yes, I should expect you to, I should want you to, but I believe we could take up that phase of the attack and protect you from——"

"I should want you to leave it alone—strictly alone!"

"Quite so. We would respect your wishes in that matter certainly. Then I may assume, may I not, that you will accept——"

"I am considering the question. I will give my answer to the committee to-day."

"Pardon my manner of presupposing, Wally—but I am unusually roused over this matter. I want you to take the race. But I think I have said all I came to say—more, I'm afraid—and I will be going. I know you are very busy—I must not take up your time."

Masterson pushed back his chair preparatory to rising. Then he thrust his hand into a pocket of his coat and drew out a small parcel tied about with red string, which he laid upon the papers which a few minutes before had been in Wally's hands. He was smiling as he drew back his hand.

"What is that?" asked Wally.

"A trifling present for the little boy, Wally. Please give it to him and tell him I sent it. I am wonderfully fond of that child of yours. I fairly envy your old Major Fronk—I am positively jealous of him. As I came here this morning to see you I saw them in the street together, the little toddler in his red sweater, holding on to the old gentleman's finger as they marched down the sidewalk. He's a lusty youngster, isn't he? The last time I visited you and played with him he almost pulled my mustache out by the roots."

Masterson paused to chuckle. But his face suddenly became grave and his eyes saddened.

"I tell you, Wally," he began again, and his voice was pitched lower now, "I tell you I'm lonesome for that little boy, for some little boy like him that I can expect to see coming running to meet me, that I can take into my arms and hug and kiss and play with and then say to myself, 'He's mine! He belongs to me!'

"I have wealth, great wealth! I know what fame is; and honors have been thrust upon me, but I would surrender them all, throw everything away to know that somewhere, some place, somebody was waiting for me, somebody belonging to me, to whom I belonged. I'm a lonely old man."

He sighed deeply and lapsed into silence, with his eyes staring into vacancy.

Wally reached out and took the little parcel and laid it on the table before him. There was a mist before his eyes and a tremor shook his voice as he spoke.

"I'll give him your present. Thank you for remembering him."

He turned to his desk and drew out the iron box from the drawer in which a few minutes before he had placed it and opened it. He gathered up the papers that he had tossed upon the table and began laying them in the box.

Masterson roused himself.

"Well, I must be going, I really must. Valuable papers?" he asked, smiling.

"Very valuable," replied Wally.

"Are they—do you think your desk here is a safe place for valuable documents?"

"No, I do not. I shall carry these home with me to-day."

Masterson had risen from his chair, as had Wally.

"Can't you come to see us soon? Can't you come to-morrow? Why not—it's Sunday, you know. Amy will be glad, and the boy and I."

"Yes, I can come, and I will. I'll be delighted."

"Come early—we'll have a lot to talk about."

"I'll be there early, very early. And don't let Major Fronk get away with that boy, now, before I get there."

"No, no! And—and I'm going to accept the nomination."

"Good! Good! I knew you would! I knew it! Now I am glad! Well, well! Oh, we'll elect you, we'll elect you! But I must not keep you longer from your work! Good-by until to-morrow. I'll be there early."

Wally hurried back to his desk, sat down and picked up his pen. His hand was not trembling now as he wrote a letter to the chairman of the Civic League, a letter that contained but one short line:

"I will accept the nomination.

"WELLINGTON GAY."













MAY 8 - 1941



